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# Manchester and its Press Under the Bomb

Britain's 'Other Fleet Street' and its  
Contribution to a Myth of the Blitz

by  
Guy Richard Hodgson

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of  
the University of Chester for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

January 2014

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# MANCHESTER AND ITS PRESS UNDER THE BOMB. BRITAIN'S 'OTHER FLEET STREET' AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO A MYTH OF THE BLITZ

Guy Richard Hodgson

## ABSTRACT

The Manchester Blitz was relatively short, lasting two nights in December 1940, when around 1,000 people were killed and more than 3,000 injured in the city centre, Salford and the residential areas near Old Trafford. This thesis focuses on the reaction to this heavy bombing by the local and regional newspapers of Manchester, which was Britain's second press centre at the time.

The newspapers, the *Manchester Guardian*, *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle*, are studied over an eight-week period from mid December 1940. According to these editions, Mancunians were unbowed by the death and destruction wrought by the *Luftwaffe* and had a steely determination to win the war. Contemporary writing, including individual diaries and reports from Mass Observation and Home Intelligence, tells a more complicated and nuanced story.

The thesis finds that the Manchester newspapers submitted their coverage to more self-imposed censorship than was being demanded even by a government desperate to maintain morale. They did so partly because they feared they would be closed down if they offended the censor, but also because they felt that patriotism had a greater priority than maintaining the news values of the time.

The newspapers could have exposed local authority incompetence and shortcomings in the emergency services but chose instead to paint a rosy picture of defiance by omission, distortion and, in some cases, deceit. They did not do so independently, but in accordance with the reporting norms in Fleet Street and other British provincial cities during the Second World War.

Circulations rose for both national and local newspapers during the war, but the cost was a further severing of the confidence people had in their press. When readers themselves became the story by being the victims of the Blitz they discovered there was often a gap between the truth and what appeared in print. It is a trust that has not been recovered to this day.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the product of a life-long interest in newspapers. I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for planting this seed and Peter Anderson, Michael Nally and Bernard Pratt for cultivating it so that it became a theoretical subject beyond the ‘Who? Why? What? Where? When?’ of news reporting. Bernard also helped with the research for the newspapers of 23-27 December 1940. I could not have written this thesis without the advice and prompting of my supervisors, Dr Michael Huggins and Professor Peter Gaunt, and I would also like to thank the numerous people who have had the patience to help and the eagerness to encourage. These include Brendan O’Sullivan, the Dean of Arts and Media at the University of Chester, Sheila Jefferson, Simon Roberts, Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova, and the staff of John Rylands and Central Libraries in Manchester.



## Introduction

The author John Steinbeck was not complimentary when he reviewed the work of journalists in the Second World War. ‘We were all part of the war effort,’ he wrote. ‘We went along with it, and not only that, we abetted it.’ He added: ‘I don’t mean the correspondents were liars... It is in the things not mentioned that the untruth lies.’<sup>1</sup> Steinbeck was a special war correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune* from June to December 1943 and in this relatively short time, his work had followed that of other reporters in avoiding writing about the reality of war and, instead, he had subscribed to an idealised view of the Allied war effort in which ‘our’ people were eternally stoic, ‘our’ soldiers impeccably brave and ‘our’ bombers unerringly accurate. He went where British journalists had travelled before. Several academics, such as Angus Calder, Phillip Knightley, James Curran and Jean Seaton, have noted that the writing of the myth of the war against Adolf Hitler had begun from the moment Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain formally announced the opening of hostilities on BBC radio on 3 September 1939.<sup>2</sup> It encompassed, among what appear often to be other rose-tinted distortions and half truths, the ‘triumph’ of Dunkirk, ‘we’re all in this together’, the ‘few’ of the Battle of Britain, genial Uncle Joe Stalin and, perhaps the most potent of all, the all-encompassing Blitz Spirit.

This thesis will help bring a further understanding of the British press and the experience of bombing during the Second World War. It will examine the myth of that Blitz Spirit that has become so engrained in the UK’s popular perception that, 70

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<sup>1</sup> John Steinbeck, *Once There was a War* (New York: Viking, 1958), cited in Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London: Cape, 1991); Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, 3rd edn (London: Hopkins, 2002); J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain*, 6th edn (London: Routledge, 2003).

years on, it is used as a metaphor of first resort for politicians and the media whenever the nation is under threat, be it from war, natural extremes such as floods, sharp economic down-turns, or attacks by terrorists. It will study the relatively neglected area of the role of newspapers in the Second World War, with a particular reference to Manchester, showing that the *Manchester Guardian*, *Evening Chronicle* and *Manchester Evening News* not only subscribed to the narrative of unyielding fortitude in the face of the *Luftwaffe*'s assault, but also contributed to it.

The first bomb to land on Manchester was dropped on 8 August 1940 and the city was attacked throughout the Second World War, but its Blitz, concentrated and prolonged bombing, lasted only two nights, 22/23 and 23/24 December 1940, when nearly 1,000 people were killed and 3,500 injured.<sup>3</sup> In excess of 50,000 homes in the area were damaged along with Manchester's cathedral and other important public buildings.<sup>4</sup> 'Manchester will remember the horrors of that attack as long as the heart of the north continues to beat,' a contemporary Co-Operative Wholesale Society newsreel reported, before adding the eulogy typical of the reporting in 1940 and 1941, 'but she will remember its glories too.'<sup>5</sup> The newsreel glossed over the fact that troops were filmed with their bayonets attached to their rifles, suggesting an over-reaction by the authorities at the very least and, more likely, an indication of the undercurrent of lawlessness in a city with its infrastructure in ruins and its population struggling to cope with, in Manchester's experience, unprecedented levels of destruction.

There has been much research into the capital's Blitz – a search of the British Library catalogue using the key words 'Manchester Blitz' in December 2012 revealed two, largely pictorial, books, an article and a journal, while 'London Blitz' produced

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<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hylton, *A History of Manchester*, 2nd edn (Andover: Phillimore, 2010), p. 253.

<sup>4</sup> Clive Hardy, Ian Cooper, Henry Hochland, *Manchester at War* (Bowdon: Archive, 1986), p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Co-Operative Wholesale Society, *The Manchester Blitz: Manchester Took it Too* (Imperial War Museum) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fte9DpZRfwo>> [accessed 3 January 2012].

187, 35 and three respectively – but relatively little about cities elsewhere in the UK.<sup>6</sup> By most criteria this is justified in that London suffered nearly half the British deaths caused by the *Luftwaffe*'s bombing, 29,890 to 30,705, but the narrative of the chirpy East Ender has become pervasive, so that other, provincial, tales have been overwhelmed.<sup>7</sup> In a book that asserted a distinctive northern English cultural identity, Stuart Maconie noted that South Shields, in the north east of England, suffered 200 air raids in the Second World War and 156 people were killed:

One direct hit on the marketplace killed more than 40 people sheltering in tunnels below the square. These are statistics to remember next time you watch a programme about the Blitz. It will be about London as always and feature Piccadilly Circus in flames and cheery Cockneys making their way to Tube stations. If you trusted the London media you could be forgiven for thinking that the south won the war single-handed and that northern England was as quiet as Switzerland. It wasn't, as the people in South Shields will testify.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis differs from other studies on the wartime press in that it focuses on the region to which Maconie was referring, the north of England, and in particular the newspapers of Manchester, which was Britain's second press centre at the time, and which would have become the principal one in the event of irreparable damage to Fleet Street. It was a city so important for national and provincial newspapers in Britain that when the Berry brothers, Lords Camrose and Kemsley, formed Allied Northern Newspapers in 1924 its Withy Grove site was described as Europe's largest single print hub, employing 3,000 people.<sup>9</sup> 'Manchester is far and away the largest newspaper centre outside London,' Camrose wrote. 'Indeed, it closely rivals the metropolis itself.'<sup>10</sup> Other studies have concentrated on national newspapers but this thesis will show that the provincial press played a role as a conduit for government propaganda. It will ask three questions. Firstly, did the Manchester press submit its

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<sup>6</sup> British Library <<http://www.bl.uk>> [accessed 27 December 2012].

<sup>7</sup> T. H. O'Brien, *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955), p. 677.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Maconie, *Pies and Prejudice: In Search of the North* (London: Ebury, 2007), p. 303.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Waterhouse, *The Other Fleet Street* (Altrincham: First Edition, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Viscount Camrose, *British Newspapers and their Controllers* (London: Cassell, 1947), p. 116.

coverage to self-imposed censorship as it strived to achieve a difficult balance between journalists' traditional belief that they were obliged to report 'facts' and government exhortations that popular morale had to be maintained and information useful to the enemy edited out? Second, were there reasons, other than self and official censorship, for the editorialising of news of the war? Third, did the reporting of the war impact negatively on the reputation of Manchester's newspapers?

According to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky:

Media coverage of wars is notable for the way in which views that run counter to official sources are deemed unacceptable, ideological alternatives are ignored and discussion is 'bounded'. Mainstream media reproduce the frameworks of political and military leaders and in so doing provide propaganda rather than 'disinterested' journalism.<sup>11</sup>

Herman and Chomsky were writing about the Vietnam War but this thesis will show that their assertions also pertained to the period between 1939 and 1945, and a consequence of this relationship between newspapers and Britain's leaders was the creation of many myths and semi-truths that have obscured 'the way Britain survived and the other stirring events'.<sup>12</sup> It also led to the further severing of the bond between newspapers and their audience. Harold Evans, a schoolboy in Manchester during the Second World War and a future editor of *The Times* and *Sunday Times*, noted that people used to quote newspapers to establish fact: 'Oh, but it was in the papers.' He asked: 'What if you could not trust the newspapers to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth? Which institution was more trustworthy, the state or the press?'<sup>13</sup> The answer would be equivocal because this investigation states that newspapers became organs of optimism, purveying what Michael Billig described as banal nationalism, in

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<sup>11</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 2nd edn (London: Bodley Head, 2008), cited in *War and the Media*, ed. by Daya Kishan Thussu and Des Freedman (London: Sage, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Clive Ponting, *1940: Myth and Reality* (London: Sphere, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Evans, *My Paper Chase: True Stories of Vanished Times* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), p. 7.

which the ‘mass media daily brings the flags home to the citizenry’.<sup>14</sup> Importantly in view of the language used by the newspapers in the study, he added: ‘the crucial words of banal nationalism are often the smallest: “we”, “this” and “here”.’<sup>15</sup>

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first provides an historical and historiographical perspective, which is divided into two chapters to allow a clearer focus on the main aspects. Their purpose is to provide a holistic view of the relationship between the British government, the press and the newspaper-buying public before and during the Second World War. The first chapter puts this thesis into context, charting the rise of mass circulation newspapers from the turn of the twentieth century and the journey towards a culture of self-censorship, escapism and kow-towing to the government that developed between 1939 and 1945. This mapping includes research into newspaper coverage of the international situation in the four weeks before the declaration of war.

As Antonio Gramsci, Ruth Wodak, Norman Fairclough and others have stated, power and newspaper discourse are synonymous and the second chapter explores the complex pressures that are applied before a report appears in print.<sup>16</sup> This provides an analytical framework for the thesis, examining the notion and origins of the myth of the Blitz and the place of myth in historical analysis. This establishes a starting point for further discussion of other, psychological, pressures on journalists, including the news values of the 1940s, the movement towards a claimed objectivity in reporting, and the internal news selection process. It also examines the historiography of the subject to ask, among other questions, what is the role of the press in times of war?

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 2008), p. 94.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2005); *Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse*, ed. by Ruth Wodak, (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1989) and Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson, 2001).

The second part of the thesis explains how the study is conducted in methodological terms, why the newspapers, 144 editions of the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Manchester Evening News* and the *Evening Chronicle*, were selected and how their influence and audience reach meet the requirements for the aims of this study. The time frame, eight weeks from December 1940 to February 1941, will also be specified and an explanation will be given for the choice of editions for the quantitative section of the study.

The third part consists of chapters focusing on a specific set of themes and so provides the analysed core of this thesis. Each chapter, typically, is organised into two main sections, the first providing a national or theoretical context before the second studies the newspapers specifically. Chapter 4 focuses on Manchester at the start of the Second World War, a city comprising multiple different communities, and its Blitz. The internal reporting structures of the newspapers in the study are also considered, with a particular emphasis on the *Manchester Guardian*, for which an archive of internal memos and correspondence exists.

Censorship is a key element of this thesis. The government created the Ministry of Information (MOI) within hours of the declaration of the war and one of its prescribed functions was to control the flow of news. Chapter 5 shows that casualty numbers were suppressed, bomb damage minimised and geographical details obscured so they became virtually meaningless. Manchester, for example, was described as an ‘inland town in North West England’ for fear of letting the *Luftwaffe* know where it had been bombing. Studying *The Guardian* Archive demonstrates, however, that while the editorial staff contested these strictures, conversely they also conducted self-censorship to go beyond what was demanded by the MOI.

Propaganda, the deliberate manipulation by means of symbols (words, gestures, images, flags and so on) of other people's thoughts, behaviour, attitudes and beliefs, was also a responsibility of the MOI.<sup>17</sup> Historians, including Knightley and Niall Ferguson, have shown that the lesson of the importance of newspapers during times of conflict had been learned during the First World War and Chapter 6 demonstrates how between 1939 and 1945 the press mirrored the distorted reporting of 25 years earlier.<sup>18</sup> Headlines and copy are analysed to show that newspapers were enlisted just as much as other industries so that propaganda was delivered on a daily basis.<sup>19</sup> This applied to Manchester newspapers as much as the rest of Fleet Street.

Part of this propaganda was the promotion of the unity of purpose and equality of suffering. But was the Second World War the democratic and classless experience the newspapers portrayed? Modern historians, Calder, Juliette Gardiner and Max Hastings among them, have demonstrated that the wealthy could diminish the deprivations or avoid them all together by living outside the industrial centres or even abroad.<sup>20</sup> Chapter 7 examines this inequality of experience and a parallel rise in crime rates as the disassociated and the selfish took advantage of reduced police numbers and the blackout.<sup>21</sup> Newspapers reported the court cases but did not make the link between the war and a sense of lawlessness that thrived in some areas.

Chapter 8 assesses the reliability of what was published in Manchester's newspapers by comparing the press to the contemporary accounts in the archives of Mass Observation, Home Intelligence and Stockport Library. These show that there was a more complex reaction to the bombing than that reflected in newspapers and

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<sup>17</sup> James Watson and Anne Hill, *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies*, 6th edn (London: Arnold, 2003), p. 234.

<sup>18</sup> Knightley; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Penguin, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45* (London: Cape, 1969), p. 505.

<sup>20</sup> Calder, *Myth*, Juliette Gardiner, *The Blitz. The British Under Attack* (London: Harper, 2010), Max Hastings, *All Hell Let Loose: The World At War 1939-45*. (London: Harper, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> *Bandits of the Blitz*, prod. by Liz Carney (BBC Radio 4, Broadcast 8 September 2010).

that the journalists' eagerness to play up the pluses and ignore minuses had the opposite effect to that intended because Mancunians became bitter that their suffering was not being acknowledged.<sup>22</sup>

Not surprisingly, the public wanted an escape from the hardship of war and demands for entertainment rose between 1939 and 1945, including for newspapers.<sup>23</sup> Circulations rose in Manchester and the non-war and lighter elements in the press were important elements behind this increase. A quantitative analysis of the studied newspapers is conducted in Chapter 9 that examines how much emphasis Manchester newspapers gave to these 'lighter' items. Statistical evidence is also used in the following chapter to demonstrate how the Manchester Blitz quickly disappeared from the news agenda. To assess whether Manchester's newspapers were exceptions to the norm, these findings are compared to similar research into two national publications, *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror*, and a local weekly, the *Salford City Reporter*.

Traditional news values, David Randall asserted, insist that a newspaper's role is to 'find out fresh information on matters of public interest and to relay it as quickly and as accurately as possible to readers in an honest and balanced way'.<sup>24</sup> This thesis will demonstrate that the work of the censor, the eagerness to print government propaganda and compliance meant that the press, Manchester and national, fell short of those self-proclaimed standards, meeting these ideals of speed, accuracy, and balance only when there was good news to spread. Even then there were occasional delays. The thesis will also show that even those who were wholly behind the war effort had their support tested. There was bravery but there were also severe and understandable psychological problems caused by the bombing. Morale was not always high, defeat was contemplated and some used the chaos caused by the

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<sup>22</sup> Mass Observation Archive, FR 538, *Liverpool and Manchester*, January 1941.

<sup>23</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> David Randall, *The Universal Journalist*, 2nd edn (London: Pluto, 2000), p. 22.



*Luftwaffe* to perpetrate crimes, preying even on the dying and the dead. Manchester suffered these aberrations from the accepted version just as any other major British city did and, ironically, for a short time after the Christmas Blitz, its newspapers' eagerness to promote the positive and move on to other news hindered rather than supported the public's curative process.

## Part I: Theoretical Framework/Literature Review

### Chapter 1

#### Historical Perspective

##### 1. The Age of the Press Barons

Although the oldest surviving news pamphlet in Britain was printed in 1513 to announce the Battle of Flodden, the era of the mass circulation newspaper did not arrive in Britain until nearly 400 years later when a combination of rising literacy levels, improved technology and the development of the railways provided a national market that Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, could supply.<sup>1</sup> He launched the *Daily Mail* in 1896 and created a template that was followed by the *Daily Express* (1900) and, another Northcliffe paper, the *Daily Mirror* (1903), but it was the first issue of the *Daily Mail* that ‘may be taken as the beginning of modern journalism’.<sup>2</sup> The *Mail* used interviews, photographs and typographical innovations such as bold headlines to break up a page, allowing for ‘the gist of a piece to be taken at speed’, and was rewarded with a million, mainly lower middle-class, readers within four years of its launch.<sup>3</sup> Sub-editors were urged to ‘explain, simplify and clarify’, a formula removed from the serious but dull competition, and, while it did not print news on its front page until the outbreak of the Second World War, it was entertaining rather than sensationalist, paving the way for modern tabloids.<sup>4</sup> Northcliffe, according to Lord Beaverbrook, ‘the greatest figure who ever strode down Fleet Street’, increased his newspaper empire in 1905 when he obtained *The Observer* and he

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Conboy, *Journalism: A Critical History* (London: Sage, 2004), p. 9; Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 112-15.

<sup>2</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 23; Political and Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press: A Survey of its Current Operations and Problems with Special Reference to National Newspapers and their Part in Public Affairs* (London: PEP, 1938), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Conboy, *Journalism in Britain: A Historical Introduction* (London: Sage), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> R. Pound and G. Harmsworth, *Northcliffe* (London: Cassell, 1959), p. 200.

purchased *The Times* three years later, so that by the First World War he controlled approximately 40 per cent of morning, 45 per cent of the evening and 15 per cent of Sunday total newspaper circulations.<sup>5</sup>

Northcliffe and his newspapers were at the centre of the rise of the political press. The need for newspaper publicity had been recognised by British political parties from the mid-Victorian period and the press 'became a tool of party management, used to communicate with the public, foreign powers and other politicians'.<sup>6</sup> Northcliffe's effect on the political class was significant and he was made a baronet in 1904, a peer a year later and a viscount in 1918, reflecting the rise of proprietors, editors and reporters to positions 'of unprecedented influence on the political decision-making process'.<sup>7</sup>

Northcliffe's political zenith came during the First World War when he became part of David Lloyd George's government and was made responsible for propaganda in enemy countries, a post he filled with sufficient success that a German destroyer was sent to shell his house on the Kent coast in an attempt to assassinate him.<sup>8</sup> Northcliffe's role in the First World War was merely the most prominent among journalists because Fleet Street became a propaganda tool of the British government, never fully reporting the horrors of the Western Front. Knightley wrote:

To enable the war to go on, the people had to be steeled for further sacrifices, and this could not be done if the full story of what was happening on the Western Front was known. And so began a great conspiracy. More deliberate lies were told than

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<sup>5</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War, 1914-16*, I (London: Oldbourne, 1928), p. 93, cited in A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 27; J. M. McEwen, 'The National Press During the First World War: Ownership and Circulation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17 (1982), 466-74 (pp. 466-67, 470-01, 474).

<sup>6</sup> J. Lee Thompson, 'Fleet Street Colossus: The Rise and Fall of Northcliffe, 1896-1922', *Parliamentary History*, 25, 1 (2006), 115-38 (p. 116).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Trove Digitised Newspapers, *Bendigoian* (State Library of Victoria, 10 May 1917) <<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/90850598>> [accessed 3 January 2013]. The outline of the shell hole has been preserved in the brickwork in tribute to the gardener's wife and daughter who were killed.

in any other period of history, and the whole apparatus of the state went into action to suppress the truth.<sup>9</sup>

The politicians were aware that a true account of the Western Front was being hidden from the public and so did the men who could have remedied that omission, the press barons. ‘If the people really knew,’ Lloyd George told the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, C. P. Scott, in December 1917, ‘the war would be stopped tomorrow... But of course they don’t, and can’t know. The correspondents don’t write and the censorship would not pass the truth.’<sup>10</sup> This thesis will further examine the propaganda of the First World War in later chapters, but the value that the British government placed in the co-operation of the press between 1914 and 1918 was reflected in the offices awarded. Apart from Northcliffe’s elevation, his brother Harold became a baron in 1914 and Viscount Rothermere in 1919, Sir Max Aitken, proprietor of the *Daily Express*, became Lord Beaverbrook, Waldorf Astor, of *The Observer*, became a viscount, Sir George Riddell, owner of the *News of the World*, became a peer and at least 12 press knighthoods were conferred.<sup>11</sup>

Northcliffe was the first of the kind but the true era of the press barons came after his death in 1922. Lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook symbolised the age in which, according to many contemporary commentators, proprietors ensured their newspapers became ‘engines of propaganda’ to further their own political ambitions.<sup>12</sup> The leader of the Conservative Party, Stanley Baldwin, articulated the concern this generated most stridently in a speech in 1931 when he said: ‘What the proprietorship of these papers is aiming at is power, and power without responsibility — the prerogative of the harlot through the ages.’<sup>13</sup> Journalism historians have

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<sup>9</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> ‘St George’s: Mr. Baldwin’s Speech’, *Times*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

challenged those verdicts since the 1980s, including Curran and Seaton, who argued that Beaverbrook and Rothermere did not break with tradition by using their newspapers for political purposes, but rather they downgraded propaganda in favour of entertainment:

Nor did they subvert the role of the press as a fourth estate; on the contrary it was they who detached the commercial press from the political parties and, consequently, from the state. What actually happened is, in some ways, the exact opposite of historical mythology.<sup>14</sup>

While the motives and the actions of the proprietors are open to debate, there is no doubt about the effect in terms of sales and reach. Between 1920 and 1939 the combined circulation of the national daily press rose from 5.4 million to 10.6 million and by 1937, together with Camrose and Kemsley, Beaverbrook and Rothermere owned nearly 50 per cent of every national and local paper sold in Britain.<sup>15</sup> Their predominance would have been greater but for the re-emergence of the press that supported the political left, spearheaded by the Co-operative Movement buying the *Reynolds News* in 1929, the TUC joining Odhams to re-launch the *Daily Herald* that same year and the Communist Party establishing the *Daily Worker* in 1930.<sup>16</sup>

The dominant figure in this period was Beaverbrook and no UK newspaper increased its circulation in the inter-war years more than his flagship publication, the *Daily Express*. The Canadian bought the newspaper, a 'derelict property', in 1916 when its daily sale was of 400,000, less than half the 900,000 of the *Daily Mail*, and by 1939 it had a circulation of 2.49 million, representing nearly a quarter of all national daily newspaper sales in Britain.<sup>17</sup> Targeted at the popular end of the market, it was unlike the *Daily Mail* in that its readership was spread over all income groups,

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<sup>14</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Franklin R. Gannon, *The British Press and Germany 1936-9* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, *English History*, p. 235; T. B. Browne, *Advertiser's ABC 1910-40*, reprinted in David Butler and Anne Sloman, *British Political Facts 1900-1975*, 5th edn (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 452.

although around 60 per cent of its sales were in the next-to-lowest group.<sup>18</sup> It was also the first national paper to put news on the front page for a prolonged time.<sup>19</sup>

Beaverbrook is one of the most intriguing figures of the twentieth century and hugely significant in the history of British newspapers, his character, according to Matthew Engel, continuing 'to exercise an extraordinary fascination' to the current day.<sup>20</sup> He was a mass of contradictions, who was summed up thus by Robert Edwards, twice the editor of the *Daily Express*: 'He was kind, brutal, considerate, selfish, honest, eccentric and a bit mad, but utterly sane in his judgement of newspapers.'<sup>21</sup> Roy Greenslade stated that he came to personify a form of press ownership that had profound effects on the public perception of the press: 'The insistent calls from 1945 for restrictions on the powers of proprietors and a brake on the growth of media monopolies were largely traceable to hostility to Beaverbrook. He was the lightning rod for every complaint about press misbehaviour.'<sup>22</sup>

There are many imperatives at work, commercial as well as political, in the behaviour of the press, which will be examined later in this thesis, and even in peace time news values were not as straightforward as might be imagined. This complexity was demonstrated by the *Daily Express*, which built its success peddling hope in the face of facts. The newspaper supported Hitler in the early 1930s but then largely neglected events in Europe. Engel wrote: 'Beaverbrook was never attracted by Nazism; the only -ism he wanted to believe in was optimism. The flaw in the *Express*'s coverage of Europe was indifference, shading into self-deception and then,

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<sup>18</sup> Gannon, *British Press*, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> British Library, *Concise History of the British Newspaper in the Nineteenth Century* (British Library Newspaper Library)  
<<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/news/concisehistbritnews/britnews19th/index.html>>  
[accessed 27 December 2012].

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Engel, *Tickle The Public: One Hundred Years of the Popular Press* (London: Gollancz, 1996), p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Edwards, *Goodbye Fleet Street* (London: Cape, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Roy Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits from Propaganda* (London: Pan, 2004), p. 7.

perhaps, to more wilful deception.<sup>23</sup> A prime example of this optimism appeared on 23 May 1938 when the *Express* printed a comment piece by Beaverbrook. 'Britain will not be involved with war,' he wrote. 'There will be no major war in Europe this year or next year.'<sup>24</sup> This message was repeated on several occasions over the following 18 months, the penultimate occasion in August 1939, three weeks before the outbreak of hostilities, when the lead headline on the front page read 'No War This Year'.<sup>25</sup> It was indicative of the newspaper's self-regard that the report was based solely on the opinions of 12 of its correspondents, all of whom would have been aware of the newspaper's policy on pessimism. Ten of the 12 expected peace and even the two who demurred were undecided. It repeated the message for the eighth and last time on 11 August.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. British Newspapers in the Countdown to War

British newspapers began the Second World War in a paradoxical position. Gannon argued that, in terms of circulation and influence, they were at their zenith, yet there are counter arguments that readers were losing trust in the press.<sup>27</sup> There was also criticism that newspapers were too hostile to Germany, most notably from Sir Neville Henderson, British Ambassador to Berlin, who wrote on 16 August 1939, less than three weeks before Britain declared war: 'History will judge the press, generally to have been the principal cause of war.'<sup>28</sup> He was writing from an exceptional position, in Germany and from the political crucible that was Berlin in 1939 in

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<sup>23</sup> Engel, *Tickle the Public*, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> 'Go About Your Business', *Daily Express*, 23 May 1938, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> 'No War This Year', *Daily Express*, 7 August 1939, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> 'No War says Lord Beaverbrook', *Daily Express*, 11 August 1939, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Gannon, *British Press*, p. 1; Anthony Adamthwaite, 'The British Government and the Media 1937-1938', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18 (1983), 281-97.

<sup>28</sup> Henderson to Strang, 16 August 1939, *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*. Third Series, VII, No. 37 (London: HMSO, 1953).

particular, but there was also criticism closer to home and 15 days earlier the *Manchester Guardian* reported a speech in Parliament by Arnold Wilson, the Conservative MP for Hitchin. In it he said: 'I would seriously suggest the time has come to consider whether we should not take voluntary powers to enable the press to control itself – at least the headlines.'<sup>29</sup> Interestingly in respect of this thesis, he added: 'We would do so without the smallest hesitation on the outbreak of war. Is it not better to do it now?'<sup>30</sup>

These comments reflect Fleet Street's position as the primary provider of news in Britain in the 1930s. The BBC gave limited bulletins on its fledgling radio service (which would improve dramatically during the war), but that outlet apart, the only sources of news outside the press came in the form of out-of-date newsreels – many of which were owned by newspaper groups – shown at the cinema. Franklin Gannon wrote:

The late 1930s... were the golden age of newspapers in Great Britain. More newspapers reached more people than ever before, or than anywhere else in the world... The newspaper press was the only means of information about the outside world for the vast majority of people.<sup>31</sup>

To meet the public's eagerness for news there were, in 1938, 52 morning newspapers in Great Britain, 85 evening, and 18 Sundays. In 1934 every 100 British families bought 95 morning and 57.5 evening newspapers every day and 130 Sunday newspapers every week.<sup>32</sup> Yet, despite this potential power, historians have argued that newspapers failed in two fundamentals of journalism: in holding the government to account in its foreign relations and in reflecting public opinion.<sup>33</sup> Lance Price

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<sup>29</sup> 'Premier and the Moscow Negotiations', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 August 1939, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Gannon, *British Press*, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> PEP, *British Press*, pp. 3, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Adamthwaite, 'British Government', pp. 281-82, R. Cockett, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), and Stephen Koss, *The Rise And Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London: Hamilton, 1984).



stated: 'When Downing Street sought the help of the press to reassure the public and downplay the threat to Britain too many editors and proprietors were willing to comply.'<sup>34</sup>

Much of this criticism has focused on the response of the British press to the Munich Agreement in that it failed properly to reflect public opinion. Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy have argued that by the summer of 1938 the *Daily Mirror* was 'already articulating a vigorous populist critique of appeasement', but Fleet Street's and the public's reaction to Chamberlain's accord with Hitler, agreed in September 1938, was initially favourable.<sup>35</sup> An opinion poll taken almost immediately afterwards showed 51 per cent of the public 'satisfied' by the settlement, with 39 per cent 'not satisfied'.<sup>36</sup> A. J. P. Taylor wrote that when Chamberlain announced to Parliament that he was to meet Hitler at Munich: 'The House broke into hysterical relief – at any rate on the Conservative side. "Thank God for the Prime Minister"'.<sup>37</sup> William W. Hadley, the editor of the *Sunday Times*, also concluded, after analysing 50 newspapers, that they were all-but unanimous in praising the Prime Minister for preserving peace.<sup>38</sup> Yet, while the press lauded Chamberlain, indicators of an alternative public mood emerged elsewhere. Alfred Duff Cooper, the First Lord of the Admiralty, resigned from the Cabinet over Czechoslovakia within a matter of days and Chamberlain and the Conservatives lost voting share in seven by-elections held in October and November 1938, losing Dartford to Labour on 7 November and

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<sup>34</sup> Lance Price, *Where Power Lies: Prime Ministers v the Media* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, 'The *Daily Mirror* and the Creation of a Commercial Popular Language', *Journalism Studies*, 10, 5 (2009), 639-654, (p. 650).

<sup>36</sup> P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1997), p. 86.

<sup>37</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 228.

<sup>38</sup> W. W. Hadley, *Munich: Before and After* (London: Cassell, 1944), p. 93.

Bridgwater to an independent candidate 10 days later.<sup>39</sup> The press did not reflect this opposition and, with the cajoling of Downing Street, was largely supportive of the Prime Minister throughout the winter of 1938-39 until Hitler marched into Prague the following spring.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Anthony Adamthwaite argued, newspapers failed to reflect a significant body of opinion critical of British foreign policy:

It used to be thought, that Hitler's Prague coup produced a sudden and lasting change in British opinion to Germany. Now it is conceded that this change was under way in the winter of 1938-39. The evidence of deeply divided opinion in the spring and summer of 1938 warrants the conclusion that a reappraisal had begun *before* Munich.<sup>41</sup>

The inability of the press at large to reflect this opinion was principally because of the overbearing presence of the government. Whereas Beaverbrook and Rothermere had campaigned for Baldwin's removal as Conservative leader in 1931, Chamberlain was seen in a more favourable light. Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1931 to 1937, he was widely regarded as the man responsible for encouraging the growth of the British economy after the Great Depression and as the natural choice to replace Baldwin.<sup>42</sup> Although he was 68 when he became Prime Minister, he was seen, David Dutton wrote, 'as one of the most dynamic forces in a government which, as the years went by, seemed increasingly to be plagued by inertia'.<sup>43</sup> Chamberlain allied that approval to personal friendships with leading newspaper figures so that he did not use compulsion, but rather influence on the men who mattered, the opinion makers such as press barons, leading journalists and the BBC. This, Richard Cockett argued, allowed Chamberlain 'to mask the real divisions that lay within the government and society', the main consequence of which was:

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<sup>39</sup> Roger Eatwell, 'Munich, Public Opinion and Popular Front', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6, 4 (1971), 122-39 (p. 123).

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Origins*, p. 25.

<sup>41</sup> Adamthwaite, 'British Government', p. 292.

<sup>42</sup> David Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Arnold, 2001), p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

No alternative policy to appeasement as pursued by Chamberlain could ever be consistently articulated in the British press, nor were the facts and figures that might have supported such an alternative policy ever put in front of the majority of the British public.<sup>44</sup>

James Margach, the political correspondent of the *Sunday Times*, described Chamberlain as the first British Prime Minister to employ news management on a grand scale:

His aim had nothing remotely to do with open government, access to information and the strengthening of the democratic process; it had everything to do with the exploitation of the press to espouse and defend government thinking. From the moment he entered No. 10 in 1937 he sought to manipulate the press into supporting his policy of appeasing the dictators. As he became increasingly passionate over appeasement and the more it came under attack from the media, the more he abandoned persuasion, turning instead to the use of threats and suppression to coerce the Press into co-operation.<sup>45</sup>

When he was asked difficult questions by the press lobby, Chamberlain would retaliate with a long, pointed, silence, then would turn away from the inquirer and demand: 'Next question, please'.<sup>46</sup> Margach wrote: 'He was the only Prime Minister in my experience who could use this weapon of the total freeze. He was completely immobile, not merely for a fleeting second but for a long pause: an extraordinary show of silent intimidation.'<sup>47</sup>

A study of newspapers in the four weeks before the start of the Second World War suggests that either by accident or by design, the growing crisis in Europe was not given its due attention until after the announcement of the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 21 August 1939 when war was considered inevitable. On 15 August the *Daily Mail* reported that the 'Danzig question will be settled without a conflict' and it believed that there were 'far bigger matters to be discussed'.<sup>48</sup> A day later *The*

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<sup>44</sup> Cockett, *Twilight*, pp. 83, 188.

<sup>45</sup> James Margach, *The Abuse of Power: the War Between Downing Street and the Media* (London: Allen, 1978), p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> 'Axis Hard at Work on "Peace Plan"', *Daily Mail*, 15 August 1939, p. 9.

*Times*, whose editor had close links to the government, wrote that the German and Italian governments were putting into shape their own ideas of a settlement in Europe. 'Its first object is, manifestly, to prevent a war.'<sup>49</sup> On 19 August the *Daily Mirror* reported that an American dancer, Miriam Verne, might be romantically linked to Hitler, following it up with a reported quote: 'I think Herr Hitler's absolutely the nicest man I know.'<sup>50</sup> The *Daily Express* mocked the 'jitter-mongers' who had long predicted that 15 August would be 'crisis day', noting that England had enjoyed a day in the sun.<sup>51</sup> Three days later its front page carried the benign headline: 'Hitler the joker', over an interview with Verne. 'When Hitler goes to a party "he's great fun",' it reported.<sup>52</sup> Stephen Koss argued that this urge by newspapers to provide distractions from the harsh realities led to editors getting involved in frequent discussions and arguments with foreign correspondents, who complained about their copy being watered down or suppressed: 'Consequently the bright spots were made to glow and the areas of darkness were left un-illuminated as they spread.'<sup>53</sup>

The optimism dimmed with the announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. 'We have done our best to preserve peace,' the *Daily Mail* commented, 'and are ready now for whatever may befall.'<sup>54</sup> An editorial in *The Times* on 2 September 1939, the day before the declaration of war, read: 'This nation has never in its history been so unanimous in support of any decision taken by its leaders as it is now.'<sup>55</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, on the same day, wrote that it was for 'the overthrow of this dictator [Hitler] and his system of government that we enter the war.'<sup>56</sup> The mood had

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<sup>49</sup> 'The Whole Peace Front', *Times*, 16 August 1939, p. 11

<sup>50</sup> 'Hitler is Charming', *Daily Mirror*, 19 August 1939, p. 5; 'Cassandra', *Daily Mirror*, 21 August 1939, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> 'Did You Remember Yesterday was to be a Crisis Day?', *Daily Express*, 16 August 1939, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> 'Hitler the Joker', *Daily Express*, 19 August 1939, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Koss, *Rise and Fall*, p. 544.

<sup>54</sup> 'Hitler Must Decide', *Daily Mail*, 25 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> 'One Man's Crime' *Times*, 2 September 1939, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> 'War', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 September 1939, p. 8.

changed from meek collusion with government policy to reluctant resignation that war was inevitable, but Cockett argued it was too late: 'By September 1939, the press had become not so much the watchdog of democracy as the harlots of democracy.'<sup>57</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

The years between the formation of the *Daily Mail* and the end of the Second World War marked when Fleet Street was at the height of its influence. There was an enormous increase in national newspaper circulation and, with it, the political significance of the proprietors rose. At the times of national crisis, during the world wars, Northcliffe and Beaverbrook became members of the government, but in the intervening years the latter combined with Northcliffe's brother, Rothermere, to launch a political party to challenge the ruling elite.<sup>58</sup> The key message that can be derived from this is that the relationship between Downing Street and the press was more complex than mere compliance to orders. The press could and did confront the government in the 1920s and 1930s, yet once Chamberlain became Prime Minister Fleet Street largely followed where his administration pointed. The motivation for this will be further examined in later chapters, but in adopting this approach the press muted voices questioning Britain's foreign policy, in particular, appeasement. This set the template for the reporting of the Second World War by British newspapers. Price was damning: 'The media were subjected to the most sustained campaign of official bullying they had ever seen and almost in unison they rolled over and asked for more.'<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cockett, *Twilight*, p. 187.

<sup>58</sup> Beaverbrook formed the Empire Free Trade party in 1929 and allied with Rothermere to form the United Empire Party. A Parliamentary by-election was won in 1930 but that marked the high point for the lords' political ambitions (Taylor, *English History*, pp. 282-83).

<sup>59</sup> Price, *Where Power Lies*, p. 94.

## Chapter 2

### Analytical Concepts and Historiography

#### 1. Mythology and the Blitz

Myth, Roland Barthes stated, is ‘a system of communication... a message’ and one of the ways that nations establish and determine the foundations of their own being, their values and their morality.<sup>1</sup> George Schopflin wrote: ‘Myth is a set of beliefs, usually put forward as a narrative, held by a community about itself.’<sup>2</sup> The on-going narrative of the Blitz of Britain was given its definition on 4 June 1940 when the Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed Parliament with a speech that has become the oral shorthand for Britain’s boldness against Hitler:

We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, and we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.<sup>3</sup>

The BBC recorded that, when Churchill spoke on the radio, 70 per cent of the population listened, and in doing so they became witnesses to one of the great mythical constructions.<sup>4</sup> Churchill’s rhetoric was wishful thinking as Britain’s army was defeated and short of weapons, and only the Royal Navy

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes: *Roland Barthes: Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Laves (London, Vintage, 1993), p. 109; George Schopflin, ‘The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths’ in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. by Geoffrey Hosking and George Schopflin (London: Hurst, 1997), pp. 19-35 (p. 19).

<sup>2</sup> Schopflin, ‘Functions of Myth’, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Winston Churchill, 4 June 1940, cited by Lewis Broad, *Winston Churchill* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> R. J. E. Silvey, ‘Some Recent Trends in Listening’, in *BBC Year Book 1946*, pp. 28-29, cited in A. Aldgate and J. Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p. 49

and the RAF stood in the way of invasion.<sup>5</sup> As Clive Ponting put it, the choice looming for Britain was to ‘become a dependency of the United States or it would have to seek peace from a victorious Germany’.<sup>6</sup>

Churchill was painting a picture of ideals, not facts, but Schopflin has argued that myths are perceptions rather than historically validated truths:

Members of a community may be aware that the myth they accept is not strictly accurate, but, because myth is not history, this does not matter. It is the content of the myth that is important, not its accuracy as a historical account.<sup>7</sup>

The creation of the myth of unwavering fortitude by Britain’s civilian population in the Second World War was borne out of an anxiety that had a comparatively long pedigree. As early as 1908 H. G. Wells had predicted the effects of blanket bombing in *The War in the Air*, writing: ‘No place is safe, no place is at peace... People go out in the morning and see air-fleets passing overhead – dripping death – dripping death!’<sup>8</sup> Newsreels from the Spanish Civil War and subsequent writing had intensified fears that had derived initially from fiction and had been articulated by Stanley Baldwin in a speech in the House of Commons in 1932: ‘I think it is well...for the man in the street to realise that there is no power on earth that can prevent him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through.’<sup>9</sup> In 1937 British experts predicted 60 days of bombing if war broke out with Germany, with 600,000 people killed and

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<sup>5</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, pp. 196-97.

<sup>6</sup> Ponting, 1940, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Schopflin, ‘Functions of Myth’, pp. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> H. G. Wells *The War in the Air* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2004), p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> See J. B. S. Haldane, *ARP* (London: Gollancz, 1938) and J. Thornburn Muirhead, *Air Attack on Cities: The Broader Aspects of the Problem* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938); *Hansard*, HC Debate, 10 November 1932, 270 (London: HMSO, 1932), cols 630-41.

twice that number injured.<sup>10</sup> David Dilks wrote: 'If ministers took literally all that was recommended to them by the best expert opinion, they would have had to expect from concentrated air bombardment something like the effects which we should now anticipate from limited nuclear warfare.'<sup>11</sup> It was, therefore, a climate of extreme fear in which the British braced themselves when war was declared in September 1939, an anxiety that declared itself in a mass evacuation of the big cities within days. Around 827,000 children were taken from threatened areas, including Donald Read, a Manchester schoolboy, who wrote:

Two years earlier, the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War and of Canton by the Japanese in China had been reported in the British press with great alarm. The widely held impression was that cities could now be destroyed from the air almost at will.<sup>12</sup>

The Blitz, the sustained bombing of Britain, is commonly considered to have started on the night of 7/8 September 1940 when London was bombed for the first of 58 consecutive nights before the *Luftwaffe* switched its attention mainly to industrial centres in the provinces.<sup>13</sup> Over the entire war, according to British official figures, more than 60,000 civilians were killed, 86,182 people were admitted to hospital, most of them seriously injured, and 150,833 were recorded as 'slightly injured'.<sup>14</sup> Derek Wood and Derek Dempster stated that, of five aims for the attacks listed by Hermann

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<sup>10</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Cato, *Guilty Men*, 14th edn. (London: Gollancz, 1940); D. Dilks, 'The Unnecessary War? Military Advice and Foreign Policy in Great Britain, 1931-1939', in *General Staffs and Diplomacy before the Second World War*, ed. by Adrian Preston (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 98-132 (p. 117).

<sup>12</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. 60; Donald Read, *A Manchester Boyhood In The Thirties and Forties* (Lampeter: Mellen, 2003), p. 72.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *English History*, p. 501.

<sup>14</sup> O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 677.



Goering, Air Minister and commander in chief of the *Luftwaffe*, the fourth was demoralisation of the civilian population.<sup>15</sup>

To counter this, the British press, under concerted pressure from the government, facilitated what Mick Temple described as ‘the creation of “necessary myths” which helped boost morale and unify the nation’.<sup>16</sup> This propaganda had it that the nation rallied behind Churchill and calmly endured the horrors inflicted on the population by Hitler’s bombers. It is a myth that endures, so that the ‘Blitz Spirit’ has become an expression used, lazily, to describe any signs of British fortitude. For example, in recent times Prime Minister Gordon Brown invoked it to rally the population to overcome the country’s economic problems; it was utilised when the West Country was flooded in 2007; more bizarrely, David Lloyd tried to resurrect it when he played recordings of Churchill’s speeches to inspire greater efforts from the England cricket team when he was the national coach during the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> These examples are constructions that underline Barthes’s assertion that myth is a ‘conjuring trick’ in which reality is turned inside out and ‘emptied it of history’.<sup>18</sup> Barthes stated: ‘Mythical speech is made of material that has already been worked on’, and Brown and Lloyd were using concepts that were 60 years old.<sup>19</sup>

The establishment of that myth began with the word Blitz itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition is: ‘an attack or offensive launched

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<sup>15</sup> D. Wood and D. Dempster, *The Narrow Margin: The Definitive Story of the Battle of Britain* (London: Arrow, 1969), p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> Mick Temple, *The British Press* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Lea, ‘Brown: the Blitz Spirit will Save Us’, *Daily Mail*, 29 December 2008, p. 4; Laura Clout, ‘Shrugging Off the Hardships with a Little Blitz Spirit’, *Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 2007, p. 7; Derek Pringle, ‘The Man who has Brought the Smile Back to English Cricket’, *Independent*, 1 July 1996, p. S1.

<sup>18</sup> Barthes, p. 142.

<sup>19</sup> Barthes, p. 110.

suddenly with great violence with the object of reducing the defences immediately', which overstates what happened even at the height of the *Luftwaffe*'s action.<sup>20</sup> London and Coventry were damaged but were not reduced to rubble and if 'Blitz' could be applied to any bombing operations it would be to Hamburg in July 1943, that killed an estimated 42,000, and Dresden in February 1945, when British and American aircrews destroyed 13 square miles of the city and killed, by conservative estimates, at least 35,000.<sup>21</sup> Britain escaped lightly when set in this context. The word Blitz had been appropriated from the word *Blitzkrieg*, lightning war, applied by the world's press to Germany's rapid conquest of Poland, and was used in anticipation of Hitler's attempt to bomb Britain out of the war. Taylor pointed out that a nine-month bombardment was the very opposite of lightning war but Terence O'Brien stated 'as heavy bombing began in the late summer [of 1940], Blitz became almost overnight a British colloquialism for an air raid'.<sup>22</sup> But from the first it suggested more than that. 'It was instantaneously and spontaneously "mythologised"'.<sup>23</sup> This, academics have pointed out, was not the result of the widespread destruction of official documents in Britain or wilful misinformation as in Soviet Russia, where historians dated the start of the Second World War as 22 June 1941 deliberately ignoring the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 that protected Hitler's eastern flank for nearly two years of the war, but from other

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<sup>20</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 4 December 2012].

<sup>21</sup> Noble Frankland and Charles Webster, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945*, II, *Endeavour* (London: HMSO, 1961), pp. 260-61.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *English History*, p. 501; O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 386.

<sup>23</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. 2.

requirements.<sup>24</sup> There was no great cover-up, but rather an acquiescence in order to search for a simple narrative. This typified Barthes's definition of mythologies in that they are without depth and they deny more nuanced reactions to events:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact... In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible.<sup>25</sup>

The notion of a Blitz Spirit was an example of this simplicity because it ignored the more complicated reaction to being bombed that will be outlined in this thesis. Its economic use of the facts also allowed the British to draw a direct, and convenient, line with another myth from the First World War a quarter of century earlier when, rather than the individual hero, literature, the arts and folklore found ways to make everyone in the armed services heroic. This, Calder argued, set a precedent for those who, two decades later, wished to eulogise the entire British population, who, apart from a few areas of London and, briefly, in other places like Manchester, suffered an experience far less extreme than that of the soldiers in the trenches of the Somme.<sup>26</sup> Yet, perhaps people struggling to make sense of their suffering needed to find a connection with the phlegmatic infantry of 1914-18:

The language of pre-existing mythologies, including the Myth of the Tommy at the Front, adapted itself to events with remarkable

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<sup>24</sup> Calder, *Myth*, Gardiner, *The Blitz*, Stuart Hylton, *Their Darkest Hour: The Hidden History of the Home Front 1939-1945* (Stroud: Sutton, 2001); A. M. Nekrich and Vladimir Petrov, *June 22, 1941: Soviet Historians and the German Invasion* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Barthes, p. 143.

<sup>26</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. 18.

‘naturalness’ and fluency and stories were generated with such success that we, born since, have ignored how frightening and confusing the period from April 1940 through to June 1941 was for the British people.<sup>27</sup>

A Home Intelligence report in February 1941 revealed that the British public felt impotent under the onslaught of the Blitz and irrelevant to the conduct of the war.<sup>28</sup> This reinforced the need for a mythology because, Schopflin argued, myth is a tool used by the ruling elites to explain misfortunes ‘that are beyond our control’. Having to stand up to the ‘Nazi regime, with almost all Europe writhing and starving under their heel,’ as Churchill put it to Parliament, was a prime example.<sup>29</sup> Schopflin listed the elites as: ‘The political and intellectual elites in the community, those who are able to gain the ear of society, those who control the language of public communication – politicians, the monarch, the bureaucracy, perhaps the priesthood, writers and so on.’<sup>30</sup> Churchill, as Prime Minister, was clearly a member of this elite, and so were newspaper proprietors and editors who amplified and repeated his message. Barthes asserted that myth is not confined to oral narrative but can consist of reporting, publicity and photographs, any of which ‘can serve as support to mythical speech’.<sup>31</sup> And if Churchill’s ‘never surrender’ urgings (followed by the ‘finest hour’ rhetoric a fortnight later) provided the soundtrack, the photograph (below), taken by Herbert Mason on 29 December 1940 and published in the *Daily Mail* two days later, encapsulated it as an image.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Mass Observation, FR 568, *Report on Morale in 1941*, February 1941.

<sup>29</sup> Schopflin, ‘Functions of Myth’, p. 25; *Hansard*, HC Debate, 18 June 1940, 362 (London: HMSO, 1940), cols 51-64.

<sup>30</sup> Schopflin, ‘Functions of Myth’, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Barthes, p. 110.

<sup>32</sup> *Hansard*, HC Debate, 18 June 1940.

To use Barthes's framework, the signifier was the dome St Paul's Cathedral miraculously appearing undamaged as the rest of the capital burned, while the signified was the indestructibility of Britain, the popular image of the inhabitants accepting everything the *Luftwaffe* could throw at them and emerging from the wreckage with the inevitable joke on their lips.<sup>34</sup> The caption in the *Mail* read: 'It symbolises the steadiness of London's stand against the enemy: the firmness of Right against Wrong.'<sup>35</sup> It is one of the most famous examples of photojournalism – it was billed in the newspaper as the 'War's greatest picture' – and, like the Blitz Spirit, did not wholly withstand scrutiny. St Paul's did not escape unscathed. A bomb demolished

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<sup>33</sup> Iconic Photos, *London Blitz: 29 December 1940* (Daily Mail, 1941) <<http://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2010/11/12/london-blitz-29th-december-1940/>> [accessed 21 January 2013].

<sup>34</sup> Barthes, p. 115; Calder, *Myth*, p. 131.

<sup>35</sup> 'War's Greatest Picture,' *Daily Mail*, 31 December 1940, p. 1.

the high altar and the crypt and some stained-glass windows were damaged.<sup>36</sup>

Barthes stated that myth stands in the way of the historian, and, in the British context, nowhere more so than in assessing the Blitz, which has taken on near religious significance in British history.<sup>37</sup> As Calder wrote: 'The heroism of the British under bombardment was quasi-Christian – its great symbol, after all, was St Paul's dome flourishing.'<sup>38</sup> It was a myth, too, that was selective in that it neglected to acknowledge that Bomber Command was inflicting the same death and destruction on German civilians and would multiply it several times over in the latter stages of the war. Calder wrote: 'Its construction involved putting together facts known or believed to be true, overlaying these with inspirational values and convincing rhetoric – and leaving out everything known or believed to be factual which didn't fit.'<sup>39</sup> Proving that the message could be altered to suit the propaganda, the Germans also used Mason's picture on 23 January 1940 with the headline: 'The City of London is burning'.<sup>40</sup>

This thesis will show that, contrary to the positivist version of events, the effects of the Blitz on London, and other parts of Britain, were varied. Academics have reported that contemporary memoirs and documents testify to 'panic, to horrified revulsion, to post-raid depression, to antisocial behaviour,' and, while the big picture was that Britain was bombed and endured, these variations to the mythologised story should be

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<sup>36</sup> BBC, *How St Paul's Cathedral Survived the Blitz* (BBC News Magazine, 2010) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12016916>> [accessed 5 December 2012].

<sup>37</sup> Barthes, p. 151.

<sup>38</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. 43.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *The Blitz Then And Now*, II, ed. by W. Ramsey (London: Battle of Britain, 1988), p. 374.

acknowledged.<sup>41</sup> Curran and Seaton wrote that the mythology has encouraged the belief that the British people closed ranks behind the unchallenged leadership of Churchill, but this has hidden less palatable truths:

This mythical view obscures the political and social crisis of the early war years, which led to a major confrontation between the government and the left press. Many senior politicians and officials doubted the commitment of the British people to winning the war. A significantly named Home Morale Emergency Committee of the Ministry of Information reported in June 1940 on ‘fear, confusion, suspicion, class feeling and defeatism’. Even the Ministry’s parliamentary secretary, Harold Nicolson, confided in his diary during this period: ‘It will now be almost impossible to beat the Germans’. For at least the first two and a half years of the war, the relationship between the authorities and the press was dominated by a constant and probably misplaced concern about the state of public morale.<sup>42</sup>

Claude Levi-Straus asked the question: ‘When does mythology end and history begin?’ His answer was that myth is a static feature that works for a moment in time but, as new information is uncovered that does not sit easily with that mythological framework, a new mythology has to be developed so that the community can retain its coherence.<sup>43</sup> The following section will examine how historiography of the Blitz has travelled from accepting the patriotic myth of 1940 to challenging it. This scrutiny will expand from the Blitz, Manchester, morale, newspapers and the Second World War in general.

## 2. The Literature

This thesis fills a gap in the neglected area of the role of newspapers in the Second World War. Specific literature on newspapers and the Blitz is

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<sup>41</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. 120.

<sup>42</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 55.

<sup>43</sup> C. Levi-Straus, *Myth and Memory* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 43.

limited and the focus on Manchester's press between 1939 and 1945 is virtually absent from published studies. There are books that look at broader themes in which the press and the Second World War are part of a larger perspective, but Manchester, the 'other Fleet Street', gets only scant mention if it is recorded at all. Instead, the field of study is broadly categorised as histories of the conflict, biographies of prominent newspaper men, studies of the social consequences of the bombing, general research into the press, and cultural theorising on why and what appeared in print.

## 2.1 The Blitz

In terms of the printed word, the creation of a mythical stoicism began from the start of the Second World War. Gramsci's theory of hegemony argued that the state and ruling classes cannot enforce control over any group or structure unless other, more intellectual, methods are entailed and the media play a central role in creating an 'acceptable' consensus.<sup>44</sup> The earliest government publications had the dual purpose of maintaining morale while purporting to be publications of record, including *Front Line 1940-41*, which was published by the MOI in 1942, and was typical in combining the facts the government was prepared to release and simple propaganda. On the Blitz it stated: 'The failure to disturb civil morale or to reduce appreciably the flow of production was complete. The great German offensive against the back gardens and front parlours of Britain met with total defeat.'<sup>45</sup> This was premature, simplistic and misleading, and this thesis will show that it conformed to the propaganda model adopted by

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<sup>44</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 21-43.

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Information, *Front Line 1940-41: The Official Story of the Civil Defence of Britain* (London: HMSO, 1942), pp. 158-59.



newspapers in 1940 and 1941. The emphasis of the German offensive, it suggested, was on gardens and houses, the front parlours where people spent most of their time at home, not the factories and warehouses fuelling the war effort that were the real targets of the *Luftwaffe*. Notwithstanding Goering's ambition to demoralise the British population, why would the Germans prioritise front parlours over the means of war production? That Britain had not been bombed into submission was correct, although the writers had no way of knowing that was going to remain the case at the time, but to dismiss the effects on morale was to distort the case, as the following chapters will show.

*Front Line*'s view on Manchester was similarly rose tinted, stating the city had been 'big enough to take the raid without much upset or disturbance'.<sup>46</sup> It added:

Manchester typifies many of the elements in British democracy to which Hitlerism is most repugnant... The city had been early to perceive the threat from Germany and to respond to the government's call for civil defence preparations. When the test came the wardens, rescue and casualty services were ready.<sup>47</sup>

This was a fabrication. The MOI knew this because Home Intelligence inspectors had sent a report in January 1941 that had highlighted the dramatic fall in morale in the city after the Christmas Blitz.<sup>48</sup> The same Home Intelligence report was also critical of the local authority and a lack of preparation of the city's facilities for the homeless, something *Front Line* barely registered.

On the fires that rampaged through the city, *Front Line* admitted 'Manchester, like the rest, was caught off guard' and, later, it conceded that

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 104-05.

<sup>48</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

the fire fighters lacked cohesion: ‘The auxiliary firemen and their regular comrades had not yet had an opportunity to become welded into a single, well-exercised unit. The problems of mobilisation, command and water-relay were therefore the more formidable.’<sup>49</sup> Buried in a mound of eulogies, this was the only suggestion that Manchester’s emergency services had lacked organisation in December 1940. Yet contemporary witnesses wrote of fires raging out of hand, buildings were dynamited to stop the flames spreading and 700 fire fighters had to be rushed from London and its outskirts to help put out the blazes.<sup>50</sup> These accounts strongly counter the assertion the city took the raid (singular, it should be noted) without upset or disturbance. The MOI had received reports from Manchester, Coventry and other British cities emphatically stating that civilian morale had been disturbed to the point that some people were questioning whether it was worth continuing the fight.<sup>51</sup>

*Front Line* typified the tone of publications during the war, reinforcing the idea that the British ‘could take it’, a necessity if the fight against Hitler was to be maintained. It was a precondition, after all, of Britain not suing for peace when its allies, Poland and France, were swept aside by Hitler’s *Blitzkrieg*. The historiography for the two decades after the war reflected this narrative, taking its lead from Churchill, whose ‘finest

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<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Information, *Front Line*, pp. 105-06.

<sup>50</sup> *Our Blitz: Red Skies over Manchester*, ed. by Cliff Hayes, (Bolton: Aurora, 1995), p. 18; M. J. Gaskin, *Blitz: The Story of 29th December 1940* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 38.

<sup>51</sup> Mass Observation, FR 495, *Coventry*, November 1940; Report 538; Report 620, *Manchester Air Raids*, March 1941; Report 706, *Liverpool*, 22 May 1941; Report 839, *Manchester Industrial Atmosphere*, 14 August 1941; Box 1, *Propaganda and Morale 1939-42*.

hour' speech had created the template. Churchill's own six-volume apologia, *The Second World War*, was typical:

These were the times when the English, and particularly the Londoners, who had the place of honour, were seen at their best. Grim and gay, dogged and serviceable, with the confidence of an unconquered people in their bones, they adapted themselves to this strange new life, with all its terrors, with all its jolts and jars.<sup>52</sup>

As the war leader, Churchill had a vested interest in exaggerating the stoicism of the public, but even he hinted that the above was an idyllic portrayal, and by no means universal, when he added that the Blitz had brought 'so many problems of a social and political character'.<sup>53</sup> Yet his positivist argument was so persuasive that historians subscribed to the tale of unyielding morale and tenacious determination until the late 1960s and, as this thesis shows, the imagery endures in the popular mind-set. Taylor, normally a challenger of historical clichés, recorded that, for every civilian killed, 35 were made homeless, with all the social problems that implied, yet wrote of 'the unshaken spirit of the British people' and that the raids 'cemented national unity' in his *English History 1914-1945*, first published in 1965.<sup>54</sup> Taylor's evidence for this fortitude did not come from analysis of contemporary correspondence but was inferred by two votes in Parliament: the defeat by 341 to four in December 1940 of a motion by the Independent Labour Party for a negotiated peace, and a similarly overwhelming majority of 297 to 11 backing the suspension of the *Daily Worker* the following month.<sup>55</sup> 'Not a dog barked,' he wrote of the latter, failing to take into

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<sup>52</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, II, *Their Finest Hour* (London: Cassell, 1952), p. 293.

<sup>53</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission, *Annual Report 2010-11* ([n. p.], 2011); Churchill, *Finest Hour*, p. 301.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, *English History*, pp. 502-03.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 503.

account the ‘deep sense of disturbance’ expressed by the National Council for Civil Liberties, concerns on the political left and a series of readers’ letters that appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* and other newspapers.<sup>56</sup> He also failed to ask whether either vote by MPs in the relative safety and comfort of the House of Commons was a true reflection of the mood in the bombed out streets of London, Manchester and Coventry.

Churchill’s interpretation of the resilience of the British people was endorsed by official sources, among the first of which was framed by Richard Titmuss in 1950. His study argued that not only was morale sustained throughout the war but also the mental health of the nation improved thanks to a universal will created by national necessity.<sup>57</sup> O’Brien was equally sanguine, writing of the Blitz: ‘The phrase “London can take it” became current and there is small doubt that this reflected the reality of the situation.’<sup>58</sup> He added that the evacuation was relatively small and that there was no panic, assertions that have since been contested by historians who have studied contemporary accounts.

This canonisation of the British civilian in the Second World War, ‘the grotesque angelism’ as Trevor Harris described it, was first confronted by Calder with *The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945*.<sup>59</sup> This book, published in 1969, was the first extended challenge to the positivist reading of the Second World War and was hugely influential on the subsequent

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Democracy and Minority Opinions’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27 January 1941, p. 8; ‘A Blow at the Freedom of the Press’, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 January 1941, p. 10; ‘Freedom and the “Bounds of Good Sense”’, *Manchester Guardian* 13 February 1941, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> R. M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, (London: HMSO, 1950), cited in ‘Edgar Jones and others, ‘Civilian Morale During the Second World War: Responses to Air Raids Re-examined’, *Social History of Medicine*, 17, 3 (2004), pp. 463-79 (p. 463)

<sup>58</sup> O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 401.

<sup>59</sup> Trevor Harris, ‘Why is There a Myth of the Blitz’ (*Observatoire Reunionnais des Arts*) <<http://laboratoires.univ-reunion.fr/oracle/documents/219.html>> [accessed 9 March 2012].

historiography and the arts, the director Richard Eyre citing 20 works, films, television and theatre, that emerged from its conclusions.<sup>60</sup> *The People's War* drew on oral testimony and the work of Mass Observation that moved beyond London and the semi-mythological construction of deepest England to the industrial cities of the north, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Calder stated that the conventional version of events, while true in parts, did not remain intact when confronted by the evidence and that the popular image was created by propagandists with the willing acquiescence of the press: 'Some journalists of the period created a myth of the Cockney wisecracking over the ruins of his world, which is as famous as the myth of the Few soaring into battle with laughter on their lips, and equally misleading.'<sup>61</sup>

Surprisingly given that he was challenging myths, Calder subscribed to that of Dunkirk in *People's War*, something he eschewed when he returned to the subject in 1991 with *The Myth of the Blitz*, a more relentless debunking of the image of the plucky Londoner. Calder argued that the Blitz Spirit formed the third part of a wartime trilogy of semi-truths that also included Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain. Dunkirk, he stated, was hailed as snatching victory from catastrophe, and while 199,000 British and 139,000 French soldiers were evacuated across the Channel, it was a defeat, as even Churchill acknowledged when he described it as a 'colossal military disaster'.<sup>62</sup> The Battle of Britain was won by 'the Few' although the numbers were not as balanced against Fighter Command as the myth insists,

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Addison, 'Angus Calder (1942-2008)', *History Workshop Journal*, 70 (2010), 299-304 (p. 303).

<sup>61</sup> Calder, *People's War*, pp. 165-66.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, *English History*, p. 486; Broad, *Churchill*, p. 288.

an assertion that has since been endorsed by other academics, including Ferguson, who wrote: 'Britain was not the underdog; the odds were about even.'<sup>63</sup> The army, the RAF, the Royal Navy and a flotilla of small ships had defied Hitler, the Blitz represented the British people's turn and in 1940 there were many examples contributing to the narrative of defiance. Calder cited Mollie Panter-Downes, of the *New Yorker*, who wrote:

It would be difficult for an impartial observer to decide today whether the British are the bravest or merely the most stupid people in the world... The individual Englishman seems to be singularly unimpressed by the fact that there is now nothing between him and the undivided attention of a war machine such as the world has never seen before. Possibly it's a lack of imagination, possibly again, it's the same species of dogged resolution which occasionally produces an epic like Dunkirk.<sup>64</sup>

Leaving aside the transformation of Dunkirk from a defeat to an 'epic', another voice might have asked: did the individual Englishman, or Briton, have any choice?

Instead, fuelled by an anger caused by Margaret Thatcher's co-option of the 'Blitz Spirit' for the Falklands War, Calder argued that the chirpy East Ender and 'we're all in this together' were stereotypes that hid the reality of an inequality of suffering and concealed less than heroic stories of despair, xenophobia and rising crime levels.<sup>65</sup> He also unpicked the unanimity of purpose, noting that Celtic nationalists, communists and conscientious objectors had different reasons for questioning the fighting of the war, while miners and other trades unionists did not need long memories to find supporting Churchill, a prominent government figure in the General

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<sup>63</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 257; Ferguson stated Britain had 1,032 fighters compared to the Germans' 1,011 and, in the crucial period between June and September 1940, Britain built 1,900 fighters compared to Germany's 775 (Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: History's Age of Hatred* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 393).

<sup>64</sup> Cited in Calder, *Myth*, p. 107.

<sup>65</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. iv.

Strike of 1926, a debatable prospect. Calder quoted a letter from Beryl, Lady Mayhew, in which she painted an idyllic Norfolk country scene inhabited by ducks, turtledoves and kingfishers. He asked:

Gulls wheeled over Dover cliffs; kingfishers darted in alders; Britain awaited invasion with quiet confidence. Thus, it is clear, was the 'finest hour' prepared for. So why were thousands of innocent aliens interned? Why were people in high places obsessed with the danger of a British fifth column?<sup>66</sup>

Calder's assertions provoked a fierce counter-reaction. John Ray claimed that the 12-month period from September 1940 was an '*annus mirabilis* in British history' and asked what would have happened if the British had failed to repulse Hitler?<sup>67</sup> He added: 'Sometimes these lessons are evaded by denigrators whose pens inscribe with metaphorical glee on the graves of the dead.'<sup>68</sup> Author Phil Craig in the *Daily Mail* stated that the 'so-called Myth of the Blitz' contained much that is true, and the 'debunking version contains much that is exaggerated, contrary and just plain wrong'.<sup>69</sup> Craig also noted that the report of East Enders booing the Royal family was based on one entry in the diary of Harold Nicolson.<sup>70</sup> Craig was correct in that Calder did not provide further substantiating evidence to back Nicolson's assertion, although he failed to ask why one of Churchill's 'strongest supporters' would record this in his diary if it were unreliable?<sup>71</sup>

This drawing of the historiographical battle lines has moved in recent years as modern academics, most of whom were born after the war,

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<sup>66</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p.109.

<sup>67</sup> John Ray, *The Night Blitz: 1940-1941*, (London, Weidenfeld, 1996), p. 12

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> 'Bunkum and the Blitz', *Daily Mail*, 26 August 2000, pp. 12-13.

<sup>70</sup> H. Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1939-1945* (London: Fontana, 1970), p. 112.

<sup>71</sup> Ponting, *1940*, p. 53.

have used Mass Observation and Home Intelligence reports to revise the story of steadfast morale. None has suggested that British morale was broken by the Blitz, but they have attempted to qualify the exaggerated claims of universal selflessness and enthusiastic cooperation that were made, frequently by the press. Typical of this approach is Ponting's *1940: Myth and Reality*, which was published just before Calder's *Myth of the Blitz* but owed a debt to *People's War* and Calder's collaboration with Dorothy Sheridan, *Speak for Yourself*, an anthology of Mass Observation reports from 1937 to 1949.<sup>72</sup> Ponting also reported that morale fluctuated, the Ministry of Information recording 'depression' and 'open signs of hysteria' in Coventry, Bristol citizens feeling 'let down', looting and 'wanton destruction' in Portsmouth and Plymouth people questioning whether it was worth fighting on.<sup>73</sup> In his introduction Ponting wrote that his purpose was to strip away the myths created by Churchill's memoirs and in this he succeeded, although the claims on the cover that it was a 'startling account of the ineptitude and propaganda' in 1940 was overblown given the number of books in his bibliography in which these same myths had already been confronted. Ponting approached his subject with the premise that the existence of the myth meant that there was a mass of lies that needed uncovering, a position as strong and simplistic as the myth of 1940 itself. But this was not the only fault as he frequently failed to provide references when he made bold statements. For example, when he quoted the senior royal naval officer at Dunkirk as saying: 'The French staff at Dunkirk feel

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<sup>72</sup> *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-1949*, ed. by Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>73</sup> Cited in Ponting, *1940*, p. 164.



strongly that they are defending Dunkirk for us to evacuate, which is largely true,' no attribution was made, a surprising omission given that it differed so strongly from the accepted British version.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, when he claimed that civilians in provincial cities left in large numbers, where was the evidence when he stated: 'In parts of Southampton after the bombing only one in five of the people were left'?<sup>75</sup> Which parts? Who did the counting? Where did they go?

Nevertheless, Ponting provided a detailed account of the revisionist position, focusing on one year. Malcolm Smith's *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory* offered a longer a view, stretching back to the pre-war period when the myths of 1940 and 1941 found their origins in the extreme fears about the effects of intensive bombing.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 165.

<sup>76</sup> Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>77</sup> British Cartoon Archive, 'Very Well, Alone' (*Evening Standard*, 18 June 1940) <<http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/record/LSE2791>> [accessed 21 January 2013].

His aim, too, was to ‘trace the changing construction of what 1940 and the war have come to mean in the subsequent 60 years’.<sup>78</sup> Smith’s main premise was that 1940 was the watershed that exposed the failure of Conservative government in the 1930s and underpinned the consensus for social change between 1945 and the 1960s. He also entered an interesting debate about Britain’s international position, in which he claimed that the, albeit qualified, victory in 1945 coloured the attitude towards the European Union. ‘Very well, alone’, the caption to David Low’s cartoon in London’s *Evening Standard* (above) read in the wake of France’s surrender and Smith employed this to draw a line from that to the solitary position adopted by opponents to European integration since. This was a stretched connection and there were others too. His suggestion, for example, that the appeal of soaps such as *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* derived from the story that began in 1940 – ‘it was the Blitz which made the community story a principal argument in the interior monologue of the nation’ – overlooked several other factors such as class and locality.<sup>79</sup> The neighbourhood, urban and rural, had been a feature of working class culture and literature since the nineteenth century and to dismiss it is to forget, in addition to many more mundane local milestones, the villages bonded in grief at the destruction of the Pals Regiments in the First World War, mining communities during and after the General Strike, and the Tyneside support that propelled the Jarrow March.

Gardiner underlined the state of fear that existed in 1939 when she noted that within minutes of Chamberlain announcing the declaration of war

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Smith, *Britain and 1940*, p. 120.

the British public were given a reminder that they would be in the front line. Sirens wailed over the capital, Londoners rushed to find the nearest shelter and braced themselves for an attack. But they were not in danger; it was a false alarm and the all clear soon sounded.<sup>80</sup> The terror and subsequent relief that would mark the Blitz had begun without a bomb being dropped or a bullet fired. That first alert, just 30 minutes into the war, was a metaphor for ‘expectation and fearful anticipation’.<sup>81</sup> Gardiner used many of the same sources as Calder, including Mass Observation, but covered the bombing of provincial cities in greater detail and provided greater thoroughness and statistics to chart the rise in crime between 1939 and 1945. She noted:

The Blitz has given the British – politicians in particular – a storehouse of images on which to draw at times of crisis... There were thousands of examples of extreme bravery, fortitude and selflessness. There was also a pervasive sense of exhaustion, uncertainty and anxiety, and acts of selfishness, intransigence and contumely.<sup>82</sup>

Gardiner insisted that: ‘The war did change Britain... the Blitz powerfully shaped that change,’ and while this claim was ill-defined, and her conclusion did not properly engage with the inherent contradiction in much of the content of her book, which was dominated by anecdotes of the continuity of British daily life, she was correct.<sup>83</sup> Attitudes to authority were altered by the pettiness of much of the regulation and provided an impetus for small crime and a fall in respect of authority.

Stuart Hylton’s *Their Darkest Hour*, while lacking the depth of research in Calder or Gardiner’s books, expanded on the effects of the bombing, including an increase in sexual activity, consumption of alcohol

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<sup>80</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p. xv.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p. 361.

and crime. He wrote: 'My idealised picture was replaced by a reassuringly mixed view of the people and the times, in which grumbles, incompetence, bureaucracy and opportunism lived alongside the sacrifice and bravery.'<sup>84</sup> He asserted that the possibility of introducing total press censorship was seriously considered by the wartime government, 'but it was felt to sit too uneasily with their self-appointed role as guardians of civil liberties in the world'.<sup>85</sup> This was over-generous.

Since 2000 the theme of several new national studies on the Blitz has been to return to contemporary accounts, including Simon Garfield, Carol Harris and Frank and Joan Shaw. Garfield's *We Are at War* recorded a more nuanced reaction to the Blitz when he examined the diaries of five Mass Observation diarists, including the Preston salesman Christopher Tomlin whose powers of description brought a vivid colour to his reports.<sup>86</sup> Tomlin described his customers as having 'the clammy touch of the grave on their souls. They are full of dread, of terror at the sound of an aeroplane. Children scream – they daren't go to bed'.<sup>87</sup> When Coventry was badly bombed on 14 November, the *Daily Express* reported the city was stricken 'but keeps its courage and sanity'.<sup>88</sup> In contrast, Tomlin reacted: 'Some of my customers say: "If they mention 1,000 killed you can take it for granted there are lots more"'.<sup>89</sup> The following day he concluded:

If we cannot stop the massacre of the innocents we must ask for peace. It's the only way. A preventative must be found immediately for the

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<sup>84</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. vii.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 143.

<sup>86</sup> *We Are at War: The Diaries of Five Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, ed. by Simon Garfield (London: Random House, 2005).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 413.

<sup>88</sup> 'A Very Gallant City', *Daily Express*, 16 November 1940, p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Garfield, *We Are at War*, p. 413.

night bomber or our towns and cities will very soon be in ruins. We keep up the pretence of cheerfulness but in reality we are terrified.<sup>90</sup>

This was an authentic British voice far removed from the Churchillian message of 'never surrender'.

Like Garfield, Harris's *Blitz Diary: Life Under Fire in World War II* and Shaw and Shaw's *We Remember the Blitz* eschewed drawing conclusions and instead allowed diarists, letter writers and correspondents to speak for their own experiences. Harris noted that the first civilian war-related deaths recorded in Britain were the result of a Heinkel bomber crashing into the home of Mr and Mrs W. Gill of Victoria Road, Clacton-on-Sea, killing husband and wife in May 1940.<sup>91</sup> When the *Luftwaffe* turned its attention to London Harris chronicled the horror and the tedium, including a letter from a teacher and ARP warden in Leytonstone, London, in September 1940: 'I must confess that the long weary hours of waiting and listening through the night, quite alone in the house with not a soul to talk to, are very trying, but I am profoundly glad that Rube and the kiddies are away. This is no place for women and children.'<sup>92</sup> Shaw and Shaw wrote to local newspapers appealing for accounts of the Blitz and were rewarded with 150 responses, many of them poignant or humorous. These included Elizabeth Godwin, whose grandfather paused on his way to church to shake the hand of a friend, keeping her long enough for her to be killed by a delayed action bomb, and the milkman losing patience after being repeatedly berated by a warden for not taking cover: 'Take cover? Take

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Carol Harris, *Blitz Diary: Life Under Fire in World War II* (Stroud: History, 2010), p. 35

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

cover? An' wot am I supposed to do wiv me 'orse?'<sup>93</sup> Usefully, *We Remember the Blitz* catalogued the casualty figures for every British city and perhaps illustrated the confusion surrounding the death tolls in that it recorded 1005 deaths for the Manchester Blitz. Less forgivable was the mistake that listed the second night of the city's bombing as 25 December 1940.<sup>94</sup>

In another, slightly older, study published in the 1990s, Tom Harrisson was more forthright in constructing his own arguments from the contemporary correspondence, using the Mass Observation Archive to give an account of British life under bombardment, chronicling that the public lived 'often in distress but often, also, in something approaching apathy'.<sup>95</sup> *Living Through the Blitz* asserted that most surviving citizens had either a collective amnesia about the Blitz or, more usually, 'to see those nights as glorious'.<sup>96</sup> Harrisson, a founder of Mass Observation, countered this 'public glossification' by recalling an account in which a Southampton resident remembered King George VI being jeered when he toured the city in 1940. 'But we were not booing the King and Queen. It was all the town's top brass who were with them.'<sup>97</sup> This apathy to the local authorities, he noted, was a reaction that was repeated in Bristol, Liverpool and Manchester. He quoted one man as saying Mancunians had a low level of interest about the city's war experience 'because the essence of the story was that morale in Manchester was low because local leaders were inept'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Frank Shaw and Joan Shaw, *We Remember the Blitz* (London: Ebury, 2012), pp. 42, x.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiv.

<sup>95</sup> Tom Harrisson, *Living Through the Blitz*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 13.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 321.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 321-2

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 322.

Harrison argued that the most important finding by Mass Observation during the Blitz was that those who had suffered severe bombing raids tended not to call for attacks of a similar nature on Germany. ‘Champions of reprisals were conspicuously more numerous in the unblitzed places and the countryside’, he wrote, advocating the theory that those who believe that air raids work are most often those who have no first-hand experience of them.<sup>99</sup>

The challenge of the continuing historiographical debate has been to balance the recorded failings of a few in the Blitz with the recorded and presumed merits of the many. This thesis will mirror the generation of historians born since 1939, who have written with a more critical detachment regarding the popular image that Britain could take it, and, at the same time acknowledge the overall perspective: Britain was bombed relentlessly in 1940 and 1941 and endured. The key question going forward will be whether the Manchester press, by failing to accurately report the Blitz, devalued the many acts of courage. If everyone is defined as a hero, how do the truly heroic stand apart?

## **2.2 Manchester and other British Cities**

Calder, Gardiner and Ponting, unlike Harrison, neglected the Manchester Blitz, a pattern that has been repeated by much of the literature, which was surprising since the death toll was disproportionately high, but the city’s newspapers brought out pictorial souvenirs, the tone mirroring the language seen earlier in *Front Line*. This chapter will go on to discuss the

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p. 314

imperatives that dictated what appeared in national newspapers and the local press was more constrained because to criticise would have been to attack its target audience. The *Daily Dispatch* and *Evening Chronicle*, both Kemsley newspapers printed in Manchester, produced *Our Blitz: Red Skies over Manchester* in 1945, and *Manchester at War*, which used the archive of the *Manchester Evening News*, was published in 1986.<sup>100</sup> Both provided valuable photographic records, but the tone of their text repeated the unrealistic optimism that was typical of what appeared in the local press in 1940 and 1941: 'It is in pride but not vain-glory, in humility but not self depreciation, we tell the story of the two nights of the Blitz.'<sup>101</sup> They told a very selective story because analysis of other sources will suggest that despair, not pride, was a dominant emotion in the aftermath in bombed out areas of Manchester.

Simon Wright's *Memories of a Salford Blitz* and Read's *A Manchester Boyhood In The Thirties and Forties* were more grounded in reality.<sup>102</sup> Wright's pamphlet was short, only 30 pages, and was a series of recollections. Mrs L. McGuire spoke of her mother 'being hysterical' with fear: 'It was really terrible'.<sup>103</sup> Read recalled the sense of shock as Manchester's complacency was shattered by the *Luftwaffe*'s bombs in the Christmas Blitz but had no recollection of the consequent plummeting morale in the city reported by Home Intelligence, a possible example of a child being shielded from his parents' darkest feelings. Ron Freethy's *Lancashire v Hitler* also lacked detail of the Christmas 1940 raids but was

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<sup>100</sup> Hayes, *Red Skies*; Hardy, Cooper and Hochland, *Manchester at War*.

<sup>101</sup> Hayes, *Red Skies*; p. 14.

<sup>102</sup> Simon Wright, *Memories of the Salford Blitz. Christmas 1940* (Manchester: Richardson, 1987); Read, *Manchester Boyhood*.

<sup>103</sup> Wright, *Salford Blitz*, pp. 11-12.



informed by interviews with people who lived through and beyond the bombardment, most notably recalling the insensitive dropping of leaflets by British bombers on the first anniversary of the Manchester Blitz, an incident that led to the panicked onlookers being criticised in the *Manchester Guardian*.<sup>104</sup> This will be returned to at the end of the thesis.

That incident, as this thesis will show, was indicative of the gap between reality and what was appearing in newspapers, a theme examined by Evans, a Manchester schoolboy in 1940 who would become ‘arguably Britain’s greatest editor of the second half of the 20th century’.<sup>105</sup> His faith in what he saw in print was undermined when he encountered listless and demoralised soldiers on a beach in Rhyl, north Wales. Evans, who would become deputy editor of the *Manchester Evening News* in the 1950s en route to editing the *Sunday Times* and *The Times*, was 12 when he met ‘still’, ‘pale’ men lying on the beach. He recalled that his father tried to strike up a conversation with soldiers who, he subsequently learned, had been evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk.<sup>106</sup> The response was muted and dispirited. It was also illuminating for a boy with ambitions to be a journalist. Evans wrote:

We had been encouraged to celebrate Dunkirk as some kind of victory. A *Daily Mirror* front page I’d seen pinned up in our boarding house had the headline ‘Bloody Marvellous!’ How was it then Dad found nothing marvellous, only dejection, as he moved among them?<sup>107</sup>

His reaction articulated many of the questions that will be confronted in this thesis:

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<sup>104</sup> R. Freethy, *Lancashire v Hitler: Civilians at War* (Newbury: Countryside, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Donald Trelford, ‘My Paper Chase by Harold Evans’ (*Observer* 13 September 2009) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/sep/13/my-paper-chase-harold-evans>> [accessed 21 January 2012].

<sup>106</sup> Evans, *Paper Chase*, p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

Later in adulthood it was easier to understand how predictive headlines could turn out to be wrong than to reconcile what we had experienced at Rhyl... How did newspapers come to conclusions? Were they acting at the request of the government? Was there a deliberate and widespread gloss on Dunkirk? Would that have been justified as a means of sustaining morale at a crucial time? Should newspapers take account of such imperatives or just report things as they see them?<sup>108</sup>

Coventry has received more attention than Manchester. An estimated 568 people died in November 1940 on a night that has led to myths and fallacies of its own, the most poignant being that Churchill had been informed the raid was coming but failed to forewarn the city for fear of letting the Germans know their codes had been broken.<sup>109</sup> Norman Longmate exonerated Churchill, writing: 'No citizen was left to die, no humble home left to burn for reasons of high strategy', and the Prime Minister's private secretary appeared to bear that out.<sup>110</sup> John Colville recalled being told to go to a deep shelter by Churchill with the words: 'You're too young to die. Tonight London is going to be flattened.'<sup>111</sup> That night the capital was spared and the huge bombing force flew north to Coventry. Allan Kurki also debunked that myth but spent too little time on this and other controversies, although he did underline the psychological effect the raid (code-named Moonlight Sonata by the Germans) had on Britain.<sup>112</sup> Coventry was regarded as a Nazi atrocity in Britain and in the United States, something that Frederick Taylor stated was an over-reaction. Coventry was a centre for light manufacturing and engineering, including

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>109</sup> *Forgotten Voices of the Blitz and the Battle of Britain*, ed. by Joshua Levine (London: Ebury, 2006), p. 306.

<sup>110</sup> Norman Longmate, *Air Raid: The Bombing of Coventry, 1940* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p. 266.

<sup>111</sup> Levine, *Forgotten Voices*, p. 41.

<sup>112</sup> Allan W. Kurki, *Operation Moonlight Sonata: The German Raid on Coventry* (London: Greenwood, 1995).

bicycles, cars, airplane engines and – ‘fatally’ – munitions. ‘A city of more than 320,000 inhabitants, was therefore, in terms of what little law existed on the subject, a legitimate target for aerial bombing.’<sup>113</sup> Taylor was being deliberately pragmatic, the human voice from Coventry was revealed by Joshua Levine who mined interviews collected in the 1970s by the Imperial war Museum Sound Archive. Thomas Cunningham-Boothe described firemen, blinded by the ferocity of the heat, having to be led away from the fires; Dilwyn Evans spoke of those same fire fighters impotently having to watch the blazing buildings as water ran out; and Joan Batt could not forgive: ‘I still feel hatred for the Germans. They took everything off me.’

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Levine also included interviews from Liverpool that demonstrated that the picture of resilience painted by the newspapers was not universal. Leslie Hyland’s mother would scream and shout during the raids – ‘She felt every explosion was coming towards her’ – while Herbert Anderson stated that the city was the only place where he witnessed peace demonstrations: ‘There were small groups marching with banners indicating that they wanted an end to the war.’<sup>115</sup> This was refuted by a *Liverpool Echo* journalist Arthur Johnson in a secret diary in which he denied the existence of the peace marches or that the city was placed under martial law: ‘A man was sent to prison for a month at Manchester for spreading such rumours, all of which were completely baseless.’<sup>116</sup> This was a rare exception in an

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<sup>113</sup> Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday 13 February 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 117.

<sup>114</sup> Levine, *Forgotten Voices*, pp. 390, 414.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 359, 412.

<sup>116</sup> Arthur Johnson, *Merseyside’s Secret Blitz Diary* (Liverpool: Trinity Mirror, 2005), p. 155.

impersonal account that was strong on the bomb damage – most of which was not reported in his newspaper – but surprisingly weaker when it came to describing the minutiae of personal lives caught up in world events and the raw emotions exposed by the Merseyside Blitz. Pat Ayers, too, produced a factual account, focusing on Liverpool's women, many of whom went to work in the city's factories at rates of pay around half those of men. She concluded that British women were victims of a 'confidence trick' on a massive scale:

Their economic need and their patriotism were exploited by men in positions of power; by the government, the trade unions, by private employers and by a nation anxious to win a war but not prepared to facilitate... equal pay or adequate facilities.<sup>117</sup>

Ayers did concede there were positives accrued, however, listing: an acceptance of married women in the workplace, the regularisation of part-time working in factories, and a revision generally of women's place in British society.<sup>118</sup>

Ayers's arguments underlined that, while most cities in Britain were bombed by the *Luftwaffe*, the experience between 1939 and 1945 was not uniform and could be determined by gender, geography and timing. The literature viewing the Second World War from a regional perspective shows that, while it was the Many as much as the Few who sustained the drive to defeat Nazism, it was also a struggle that involved the United Kingdom as a whole (rather than just south-east England). This thesis concentrates on Manchester, but individual regions, cities and towns had versions of the Second World War that were uniquely their own.

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<sup>117</sup> Pat Ayers, *Women at War: Liverpool Women 1939-45*, (Birkenhead: Liver, 1988), p. 55.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

### 2.3 Morale, Propaganda and Censorship

The emphasis on the Home Front in the first two years of the war ensured that morale was a key component in all the above literature and, indeed, in most books about the British experience in Second World War. Defining what was meant by the word was complex, however, Paul Addison describing it in his painstakingly researched *The Road to 1945* as ‘the woolliest and most muddled concept of the war’.<sup>119</sup> Edgar Jones *et al* adopted the template of Stephen Taylor, a director of Home Intelligence, who stated that it should be defined ‘not by what a person thinks or says, but by what he does and how he does it’, a suspect approach given that much of what people did remained unreported, even to Home Intelligence, and, furthermore, it was not until 1943 that the Home Office recognised that factors affecting post-raid morale must be located within a broad conceptual framework.<sup>120</sup> Jones *et al*’s evaluation of the psychological effects of the Blitz concluded that mental illness did not increase significantly during the bombing but agreed a question had been raised about the high incidence of psychosomatic disorders, such as ‘effort syndrome and non-ulcer dyspepsia’.<sup>121</sup> Their research lacked the robustness that a detailed analysis of hospital admission and out-patient records would have brought – something they themselves admitted – but they did offer two reasons why civilians did not suffer shell shock on the scale of soldiers in the First World

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<sup>119</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Cape, 1975), p. 121.

<sup>120</sup> S. Taylor, ‘Home Morale and Public Opinion’, *Ministry of Information Weekly Reports*, 8 October 1941, cited in Jones and others, *Civilian Morale*, p. 465; Public Record Office, Home Office, a note on the *Meaning and Measurement of the Morale of Towns in Relation to Air Raids*, 2 February 1943, cited in B. Beaven and D. Thoms, ‘The Blitz and Civilian Morale in Three Northern Cities, 1940-1942’, *Northern History*, 32 (1996), 195-203, (p. 195).

<sup>121</sup> Jones and others, *Civilian Morale*, p. 478.

War. First, the casualty rates were far higher in the trenches, and second, the civilian had less incentive to go into hospital. For the soldier it meant a transfer to a safer, non-combatant, role; the civilian, who was rarely transferred far away from his or her home, was still at danger from falling bombs.

Robert Mackay's definition of morale was drawn from what he described as the contemporary consensus, 'a composite of attitude and behaviour', and one of the stated ambitions of *Half the Battle* was to reassert 'the basic veracity of the received picture of the British people in the war'.<sup>122</sup> While accepting there were exaggerations, he compiled a comprehensive amount of evidence to press his case, although a lack of statistical backing undermined his assertions that work by women volunteers 'far outweighed the negative features of civilian behaviour on the home front – absenteeism, strikes, looting, blackmarketeering, and the like'.<sup>123</sup> Brad Beaven and D. Thoms provided a counter argument, noting steep falls in morale in Hull and Manchester when they used Mass Observation reports to analyse the public mood between 1940 and 1942 in three northern cities. While there were city and regional differences, they argued, the principal factor governing morale was the impact bombing raids had upon the infrastructure of a community.<sup>124</sup> Thus Manchester and Hull suffered because many city-centre shops were destroyed and gas, light and water supplies disrupted, while Liverpool, whose public utilities largely escaped damage, was surprisingly upbeat at the start of 1941. Yet five

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<sup>122</sup> Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 2, 251.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>124</sup> Beaven and Thoms, *Civilian Morale*, p. 200.

months later, when Liverpool's centre came under intense attack and some people had to sleep under tarpaulins in fields, 'the grimness of the people had a menacing note'.<sup>125</sup> It was a compelling argument but it failed to take into account other factors such as the efficiency of local authorities, economic factors and the role of the church and other spiritual leaders in maintaining civilian spirits.

The responsibility for maintaining morale lay with the Ministry of Information, a creation that inspired the Ministry of Truth in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.<sup>126</sup> Ian McLaine used the MOI's official documents and other primary and secondary sources to write a history of the unloved institution, acknowledging the part it played in improving social surveys in Britain by co-ordinating the efforts of Home Intelligence, Mass Observation, the Royal Institute of Public Opinion and others.<sup>127</sup> The outcome was a further contribution to the existing knowledge of anti-German feeling, anti-Semitism and reactions to air raids, although McLaine's assertion that the MOI became more effective when it became less manipulative and produced 'full and honest news' does not sit easily with his converse opinion that it was maligned and ridiculed without mercy.<sup>128</sup>

Part of the MOI's remit was propaganda, a concept described by Michael Balfour as the art of 'inducing people to leap to conclusions without adequate examination of the evidence' and the debt owed to 1914-

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Rose, 'Englands His Englands', in *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. by John Rodden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 28-42 (p. 31).

<sup>127</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

18 by Britain's propagandists in the Second World War was examined by Ferguson's *The War of the World*, a book that excelled in finance and statistics yet neglected social and cultural history.<sup>129</sup> For example, Ferguson's eagerness to attribute economic and demographic reasons for the worst genocides of the twentieth century meant that he neglected to do full justice to the impact of political decision-making or the role of mass media. Philip Taylor's *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*, a book, compiled from journal articles and book chapters, engaged with the dilemma that confronted the Chamberlain and Churchill governments, that professed to be fighting for freedoms while at the same time suppressing the domestic press.<sup>130</sup> Citing G. N. Gordon, Taylor noted: 'A common cultural conceit in liberal democracies is the belief that the amount of censorship at any given time is decreasing and that speech is becoming increasingly free, while quite the opposite obtains'.<sup>131</sup>

Censorship, as envisaged by the British government in 1939, was described by Price as something 'of which any totalitarian state would be proud', but as he added, reality did not match intent.<sup>132</sup> The Ministry of Information, he wrote, got off to a poor start and was 'better known to journalists as the ministry of aggravation'.<sup>133</sup> Price's interest was the relationship between Downing Street and Fleet Street, something that he

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<sup>129</sup> Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War, 1939-1945: Organisations, Politics and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 421; Ferguson, *War of the World*.

<sup>130</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

<sup>131</sup> G. N. Gordon, *Persuasion: The Theory and Practice of Manipulative Communication* (New York: Hastings House, 1971), p. 502, cited in Taylor, *British Propaganda*, p. 153.

<sup>132</sup> Robert Rhodes James, *Memoirs of a Conservative. J. C. C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969) p. 425, cited in Price, *Where Power Lies*, p. 109.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, p. 109.



described as entering its 'darkest period' during the Second World War.<sup>134</sup>

This was not because they were a loggerheads, he added, but because 'they were too cosy, too complacent and too ready to join in a conspiracy of misinformation'.<sup>135</sup> It was surprising, therefore, that he did not engage more with the motivation of editors who exceeded the demands of the censor.

George Thomson, a rear admiral who was chief censor from 1940 until the end of the war, articulated the Ministry of Information's side of the relationship with the press in *Blue Pencil Admiral*, an account that, inevitably, was subjective, and avoided tackling the threat of suspension of the *Daily Mirror* in 1942, but nevertheless shed light on the rationale and motivation behind much of the censorship. Censorship, he argued, was a necessary evil. 'It was, and always will be, distasteful to the British people. For Britain was the birth-place of a free press.'<sup>136</sup> This is debatable, both as a fact and an opinion, and has been challenged by many academics, including John Street, who stated: 'No state, whatever its constitution, tolerates complete freedom of expression.'<sup>137</sup> Temple's *The British Press* gave more extensive coverage to Churchill's threat to close the *Daily Mirror* in 1942 stating that the Prime Minister was surprised by the resistance of the mainstream press and MPs, who 'turned the affair into a critique of his potentially dictatorial actions'.<sup>138</sup> That resistance by Fleet Street suggested a strength to resist controls that was hardly ever called upon and that the relationship between Fleet Street and Downing Street was

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> George P. Thomson, *The Blue Pencil Admiral: The Inside Story of Press Censorship* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1947), p. 216.

<sup>137</sup> J. Street, *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 250.

<sup>138</sup> Temple, *British Press*, p. 48.

more sophisticated than mere kow-towing, something Temple did not fully examine.

Paul Fussell was an American and much of *Wartime* concentrated on the United States rather than Britain. Nevertheless, he provided a valuable insight into the psychological and emotional journey travelled by British civilians and troops in the Second World War and the lies, distortions and euphemisms needed to endure life between 1939 and 1945. To have a Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, he wrote, it was necessary for an atmosphere to exist where presentation replaced actuality so that things are conventionally asserted to be true even though ‘smart people’ knew them to be false. ‘Goebbels conceived that absolutely anything could be believed as long as it was asserted officially with a straight face.’<sup>139</sup> He added:

The Goebbels world, or something like it, is one of the noticeable legacies from the Second World War to the present. And in wartime outright lies were not necessary. Just a little shading, a little tinting, a little withholding of unpleasant facts would do.<sup>140</sup>

What he did not ask was whether there was a more complex reaction, other than gullibility and compliance, from the audience in general.

## 2.4 Newspapers, Press Barons, and the BBC

Many Prime Ministers have attempted to control newspapers and the history of this fraught affiliation was examined by Margach, a political correspondent for almost 50 years, in *The Abuse of Power: the War Between Downing Street and the Media*.<sup>141</sup> The title of the book indicated this was a

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<sup>139</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, p. 154.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Margach, *Abuse of Power*.

narrow study, and the word 'war' suggested the subject was approached from a preconceived position that denied more complicated relationships, yet in it Margach detailed the 'battles between the two empires' from David Lloyd George in 1916 to James Callaghan 60 years later. He was particularly harsh on Chamberlain, describing him as 'the most authoritarian, intolerant and arrogant' of Prime Ministers', but made no concession to the pressure the international situation was bringing to bear on his subject, naturally a shy man who was nearing 70 when he was flying between London and Munich in 1938.<sup>142</sup> Also, Margach's book was written before the publication of government papers that has led to a revision of the verdict prevalent on Chamberlain in the last 25 years. Margach was more kind to Churchill even though the war leader shared Chamberlain's distaste for the press despite having been a journalist in his younger years. Margach explained:

The reason for this was perfectly simple: during his astonishingly long career at Westminster he never had any direct personal contact with the press in general or with political correspondents in particular. He was a journalist who loved journalism but who never mixed with journalists and who had no understanding or sympathy with the job they were doing.<sup>143</sup>

Churchill first made his name as a war correspondent at the end of the nineteenth century, becoming a member of what William Howard Russell, a founder member of the breed, described as a luckless tribe.<sup>144</sup> Fortune was the least of the shortcomings in those reporting the conflict from 1939 to 1945 according to Knightley, whose *The First Casualty* gave a generally damning verdict. His book examined war reporting from the

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 51.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>144</sup> Cited in Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 1.

Crimea to the Balkans in the 1990s and, in his view, reporters in the Second World War became pedlars of propaganda. This, and a failure to acknowledge it, had implications: 'If sufficient correspondents had undertaken a critical look at their performance, some improvement in the whole standard of war reporting might have followed,' he wrote.<sup>145</sup>

The reasons behind newspapers' lack of interrogation in the build-up to the Second World War were examined by Koss, who provided an extensively researched account of the press barons in *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*. He argued that this was a legacy of 1914 when newspapers believed they had helped propel Britain into the First World War and as a consequence editors were too circumspect 25 years later.<sup>146</sup> Editors, he wrote, did not need prompts from Downing Street:

Rightly, or wrongly, inflammatory journalism was considered to have been one of the principal causes of the previous war. That harrowing experience cast as long a shadow in Fleet Street as in Downing Street, and no one wanted to repeat it.<sup>147</sup>

Gannon's *The British Press and Germany 1936-9* suggested this stance had financial as well as moral imperatives. Newspapers, he argued, emerged from the Depression with good economic reasons to encourage recovery by creating a good psychological atmosphere.<sup>148</sup> For this purpose they tended to emphasise contentment at home and security abroad. Both financially and intellectually it was unwise or impossible for the British press to adopt a strongly critical line towards Nazi Germany. Gannon stated: 'The readers did not want to read it, and the intellectuals did not want to

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>146</sup> Koss, *Rise and Fall*, p. 543.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 87-88.

write it.’<sup>149</sup> This interpretation was open to criticism on at least two grounds: Firstly, on what basis were the readers’ opinions judged? Second, who and where were these intellectuals refusing to write for newspapers? Equally contentious was Gannon’s assessment of the standing of the foreign correspondent, which he described as the ‘veritable ideological James Bonds of their time’. He added that the foreign correspondent ‘became a knowledgeable, romantic and ultimately reassuring figure’, which was too strong given the doubts about the press sown in the public’s minds by the reporting of the First World War.<sup>150</sup>

The hand of the government was evident in the headlines and copy between 1914 and 1918 and Stanley Harrison detected the influence of Downing Street in the build-up to the Second World War, claiming in *Poor Men’s Guardians* that the ‘There will be no war’ optimism in the *Daily Express* throughout 1938 and 1939 was ‘carefully orchestrated’ by Sir Samuel Hoare.<sup>151</sup> Harrison wrongly described Hoare as the Foreign Secretary (he had resigned from that post in December 1935 and had become Home Secretary in May 1937) but cited the former editor of the *Daily Herald* Francis Williams in describing the gentle pressures applied at confidential meetings arranged by Hoare with newspaper proprietors.<sup>152</sup> As a consequence, Harrison wrote: ‘Many British newspapers established close relations with the Nazis and played Hitler’s game.’<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>151</sup> Stanley Harrison, *Poor Men’s Guardians: A Survey of the Struggle for a Democratic Newspaper Press 1763-1973* (Southampton: Camelot, 1974), p. 203.

<sup>152</sup> Francis Williams, *Press, Parliament and People* (London: Heinemann, 1946), cited in Harrison, *Poor Men’s Guardians*, p. 203.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

There are many biographies about these press magnates and the men they employed as editors of national newspapers. J. Lee Thompson's *Northcliffe: Press Baron in Politics* and Reginald Pound and Geoffrey Harmsworth's *Northcliffe* charted the narrow line between genius and megalomania that were characteristics of the founder of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* while *Beaverbrook*, which was an official biography by the subject's friend Taylor and was lacking in proper critical analysis, provided insights into the mind of another great newspaper proprietor.<sup>154</sup> There are also histories of national newspapers, but, perhaps because paper rationing curtailed the number of memos, David Ayerst's *The Manchester Guardian* (22 pages out of 700), the internally produced *The History of The Times*, and Lord Burnham's *The Story of the Daily Telegraph* failed to devote the pages to the war period that might be anticipated.<sup>155</sup> Surprisingly, Ayerst, whose scrupulous searching of *The Guardian* Archive provided much of his material and covered important information about the running of the newspaper in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, did not mention the numerous important stories that the editor, William Percival Crozier and the *Guardian* chose not to print during the war. These will be examined later in the thesis.<sup>156</sup>

The history of British journalism is far more trodden ground, with Engel's *Tickle the Public*, and Conboy's *Journalism: A Critical History* typical in providing assiduous background on the rise of the press barons in

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<sup>154</sup> J. Lee Thompson, *Northcliffe: Press Baron in Politics 1865-1922* (London: Murray, 2000); Pound and Harmsworth, *Northcliffe*; A. J. P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

<sup>155</sup> *Times* staff, *History of The Times*, Part 2. 1921-1948 (London: *Times*, 1952); Lord Burnham., *Peterborough Court: The Story of the Daily Telegraph* (London: Cassell, 1955).

<sup>156</sup> *Fifty Great Years: Through The Eyes of the Evening Chronicle, 1897-1947*, ed. by Henry J. Bradley, (Manchester: Kemsley, 1997).

the twenties and thirties.<sup>157</sup> Engel's idiosyncratic account described the alliance of Beaverbrook and Rothermere that led to the formation of a political party as 'barely credible', adding 'the two press lords really did seem to think they could take over the country'.<sup>158</sup> Conboy argued that this had important implications because the effect of the two lords' political interventions was to persuade the government to set up the BBC as a public service 'without a hectoring proprietor or the commercial demands of advertisers'.<sup>159</sup> He reported that the war was pivotal for the media as the public looked to the BBC for news:

The Second World War was the defining moment in the prestige of the BBC both nationally and internationally and, more importantly, of radio journalism as a medium which could deliver a quality and speed of information which were to become admired as a model of democratic discourse to counter the flow of broadcast totalitarianism.<sup>160</sup>

The BBC has divided historians. None doubted that the corporation emerged from the Second World War with an enhanced reputation, but the verdict on its output is less clear-cut. Curran and Seaton credited the BBC with inventing propaganda 'in its British form' and stated that the corporation was 'almost certainly the most important instrument of domestic propaganda during the war', adding it 'seldom lied if it could avoid doing so'.<sup>161</sup> Nicholas Pronay was more fulsome, arguing that the British news media, with the BBC to the fore, 'managed to maintain the trust of the British public at home and gained a reputation for Britain abroad

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<sup>157</sup> Engel *Tickle the Public*; Conboy, *Critical History*.

<sup>158</sup> Engel, *Tickle the Public*, p. 116.

<sup>159</sup> Conboy, *Critical History*, p. 177.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>161</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, pp. 111, 120, 139.

for having even in wartime an honest, free and truthful media'.<sup>162</sup> This, Sian Nicholas found remarkable: 'British people were only told what their war leaders wanted them to know, were told much that was deliberately false, and were denied knowledge of much more that they may have wished to know.'<sup>163</sup> Perhaps Richard Crossman summed it up best when he wrote: 'You must hate propaganda to do it well.'<sup>164</sup> Kevin Williams was largely complimentary about the UK's national broadcaster, stating that the conflict was a war of words 'with the BBC at its heart', but also noted that government pressure meant that programmes on post-war reconstruction were shelved or broadcast in a diluted form.<sup>165</sup> Most damningly, the Beveridge Report, which led to the formation of the National Health Service, was ignored thanks to the overtures of the government after initial enthusiastic coverage.<sup>166</sup> Williams also noted a watershed for newspapers, writing that Churchill's attempt to suspend the *Daily Mirror* in 1942 proved to be a turning point as the Prime Minister had to back down in the face of pressure in Parliament and the wider country. Williams wrote: 'This was the last attempt to use Regulation 2D to prevent the publication of material in the press that the government did not like.'<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> N. Pronay, 'The News Media at War', in *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45*, ed. by N. Pronay and D. W. Spring (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp.173-208 (p. 174).

<sup>163</sup> S. Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and Wartime BBC* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 220.

<sup>164</sup> Cited in Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 139

<sup>165</sup> Kevin Williams, *Get Me a Murder a Day: A History of Media and Communication in Britain*, 2nd edn (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp. 136, 140.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.



### 3. News Values, Objectivity and Reporting in War

An important element of this thesis is news values and whether the coverage of 1940 can be judged by twenty-first century criteria. News values are the benchmarks by which journalists measure the worth of stories and are used to prioritise the collection and production of news, and, although they ‘may not be written down or codified by news organisations... they exist in the daily practice and in knowledge gained on the job’.<sup>168</sup>

Certainly, a reporter covering the Second World War was not short of advice in terms of the function of his trade or what made news. C. P. Scott, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* for 50 years, writing to commemorate the *Guardian*’s centenary in 1921, defined the press’s function thus:

The primary office is the gathering of news. At the peril of its soul it must see that the supply is not tainted. Comment is free, but facts are sacred... The voice of opponents, no less than of friends, has a right to be heard. Comment also is justly subject to a self-imposed restraint. It is well to be frank; it is even better to be fair.<sup>169</sup>

Seventeen years on, a leader in *The Times* stated that a newspaper’s role was to ‘help form an opinion, guide it, give it articulate expression, endeavour to make it prevail’.<sup>170</sup> Even during the war, Home Intelligence gave a contemporary definition of the function of the press as ‘to gather, to make known, and to interpret news of public interest’.<sup>171</sup> But these definitions, while noble in intent, are not as simple as they might seem. What is the

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<sup>168</sup> Tony Harcup and Deirdrie O’Neill, ‘What is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisted.’, *Journalism Studies*, 2, 2 (2001), 261-280, (p. 261).

<sup>169</sup> David Ayerst, *The Manchester Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (London: Guardian, 1971), p. 435.

<sup>170</sup> *Times*, 1938, cited in Mass Observation, Mass Observation, FR 126, *Report on the Press*, May 1940.

<sup>171</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

definition of a fact, for example, and who judges what is fair or what is of public interest? And who would originate opinion? Frequently in the Second World War the answer to the last question was: the government or other elites such as newspaper proprietors. This section will look at the key issues affecting journalism and news values: objectivity, impartiality, balance and truth. It will also ask what is the role of newspapers in times of war? This is a key question in regards to this thesis. Knightley wrote:

From the very beginning, war correspondents faced a dilemma that remains unresolved to this day: whose side are they on? Correspondents have to choose because the aims of the military and the media are irreconcilable.<sup>172</sup>

### 3.1 News values

Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge first brought an academic approach to the understanding of news values when they published a landmark paper ‘The Structure of Foreign News’ in 1965, but it is important for this thesis that Tony Harcup and Deirdrie O’Neill felt the need to update these pre-requisites when they revisited, and applied domestic parameters to, Galtung and Ruge’s criteria nearly 40 years later.<sup>173</sup> Harcup and O’Neill stated that news stories must generally satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

- 1) The Power Elite. Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions.
- 2) Celebrity. Stories concerning people who are already famous.
- 3) Entertainment. Stories concerning sex, show business, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines.
- 4) Surprise. Stories that have an element of surprise and/or contrast.
- 5) Bad News. Stories with particularly negative overtones, such as conflict or tragedy.

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<sup>172</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, cited in Tom Goldstein, *Journalism and Truth: Strange Bedfellows* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 82

<sup>173</sup> Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge, ‘The Structure of Foreign News: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers’, *Journal of International Peace Research*, 1 (1965), pp. 64-91.

- 6) Good News. Stories with particular positive overtones such as rescues or cures.
- 7) Magnitude. Stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact.
- 8) Relevance. Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience.
- 9) Follow-up. Stories about subjects already in the news.
- 10) Newspaper Agenda. Stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda.<sup>174</sup>

Harcup and O'Neill's need to make adjustments to Galtung and Ruge's litany showed that news values alter with time and, certainly, the 2001 list would not have been wholly applicable in 1940 – witty headlines and celebrity gossip were either a rarity or largely publicity-driven, for example, by film studios. Importantly, however, the vast majority would stand. Andrew Marr, a former editor of *The Independent* and now a BBC journalist, stated: 'Most news values have not changed', noting *The Times*'s coverage of the Battle of Trafalgar was comparable to that of the war in Iraq in 2003.<sup>175</sup> He added: 'Over the centuries, newspapers change shape, order the news differently and target different groups of people. Some slant even hard news for political effect. But the hard news agenda itself seems an unalterable part of modern urban life.'<sup>176</sup>

Other media historians concur, stating that journalism evolved from the seventeenth and eighteenth century purveyors of opinion so that newspapers, by the late nineteenth century, had become more the distributors of information in the guise of facts. Williams wrote:

The duty of journalism in the first half of the nineteenth century... was not to discover the truth. The emphasis was on the polemical power of the writer's pen. Opinion and commentary were the essence of good journalism – except in the recording of parliamentary activity where accuracy was considered vital... By the end of the century technology

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<sup>174</sup> Harcup and O'Neill, 'What is News?', p. 279.

<sup>175</sup> Andrew Marr, *My Trade* (London: Macmillan, 2004) p. 113.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

and commercial need had elevated accuracy and reliability, as well as the ability to meet the daily news deadlines, to the profession of journalism.<sup>177</sup>

*The Times* predated Williams's opinion in 1852 when it defined the role of journalism after coming under attack from the Prime Minister, Lord Derby:

'The first duty of the press is to obtain the earliest and most correct intelligence of the events of the time and instantly, by disclosing them, to make them the common property of the nation.'<sup>178</sup> *The Times* continued by comparing the journalist to a historian in that the former should seek out 'the truth as near as he can attain it'.<sup>179</sup>

Roger Fowler provided a more up-to-date definition of the role of the reporter when he stated: 'He or she collects facts, reports them objectively and then the newspaper presents them fairly and without bias, in language which is designed to be unambiguous, un-distorting and agreeable to readers.'<sup>180</sup> He also agreed that this was an ideal that was compromised by the production of news, and an inclination to select, limit and promote certain agenda and ideas, which will be examined below.

### 3.2 Objectivity

Tosh has written that newspapers are produced mostly with a view to their impact on contemporary opinion and consequently historians attach greater weight to them than memoirs written with posterity in mind:

But the fact of publication sets a limit on the value of these sources. They consider only what was considered to be fit for public consumption –

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<sup>177</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 53.

<sup>178</sup> Cited in F. Williams, *Dangerous Estate: The Anatomy of Newspapers* (London: Arrow, 1959), p. 15.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the British Press* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 1.

what governments are prepared to reveal, what journalists could elicit from tight-lipped informants, what editors thought would gratify their readers, or MPs their constituents.<sup>181</sup>

Tosh's reservations automatically set limits on every report that appears in newspapers, yet some scholars of the media have argued that by the start of the Second World War, in the context of the rise of Fascism and Nazism, it was common currency in Fleet Street that reports should be as objective as possible.<sup>182</sup> A different tradition of objectivity evolved in the United States, but Michael Schudson wrote that by the 1920s journalists had come to accept that, while 'facts' were in reality individually constructed interpretations, these interpretations could and should be 'constructed in a methodologically objective manner, i.e. using professionally agreed rules which could minimise the impact of subjectivity on reporting'.<sup>183</sup> Gaye Tuchman, also writing about American newspapers, stated objectivity should be a guiding principle, noting that: 'Newspapermen must be able to invoke some concept of objectivity in order to process facts about social reality'.<sup>184</sup>

There were qualifications, however. Brian McNair stated that criticism of objectivity was often based on content analysis that showed journalism can never be neutral and value free, but 'is fundamentally interpretative, embodying the dominant values and explanatory frameworks

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<sup>181</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 2000), p. 43.

<sup>182</sup> Michael Bromley, 'Objectivity and the Other Orwell', *Media History*, 9 (2003), 123-35 (pp. 123, 131); Conboy, *Critical History*, p. 191; Brian McNair, *News and Journalism in the UK*, 4th edn (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 54.

<sup>183</sup> M. Schudson, *Discovering News: A Social History of American Newspapers*, 4th edn (New York: Basic, 1978), p. 141.

<sup>184</sup> Gaye Tuchman, 'Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity', in *News: A Reader*, ed. by Howard Tumber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 297-307 (p. 297).

of the society within which it is produced'.<sup>185</sup> Howard Tumber and Marina Prentoulis, on a similar theme, described objectivity as a concept underpinning journalism as 'inherently ambiguous'.<sup>186</sup> They argued that objectivity is an impossible goal yet also stated that, despite that qualification, it is important to acknowledge that objective reporting is associated with gathering news and reporting it in a detached and impersonal way free of value judgements. Chris Frost, while acknowledging that objectivity had taken on an 'an almost mythical status for journalists over the past century', outlined the inherent complexity of that ambition:

Which stories are covered and how they are covered are more likely to be affected by practical and logistical pressures than by careful consideration of the philosophical niceties of objectivity. The ability to access a story, for instance, can have a direct effect on how objective or even truthful a reporter can be. There was much concern, quite rightly, during the Iraq war about reporters being embedded with troops. This limited the ability of reporters to access news from sources other than a particular group of soldiers.<sup>187</sup>

Mark Hampton, maintained a stronger line, arguing that, with the exceptions of the BBC and the news agency Reuters, objectivity has never been 'accepted as a generalised ideal among British journalists'.<sup>188</sup> Even within these parameters, however, Hampton did concede that British reporters in the twentieth century were influenced by such concepts as 'accuracy, truth, fair play and independence', and, the consensus was that those absolutes, or something as close as possible, was an aim of reporters by 1940.<sup>189</sup> The

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<sup>185</sup> McNair, *News and Journalism*, pp. 38, 54.

<sup>186</sup> Howard Tumber and Marina Prentoulis, 'Journalists Under Fire: Subcultures, Objectivity and Emotional Literacy' in *War and the Media*, ed. by Thussu and Freedman, 215-30 (p. 216).

<sup>187</sup> Chris Frost, *Journalism Ethics and Regulation*, 3rd edn (Harlow: Pearson, 2011), pp. 73, 76.

<sup>188</sup> Mark Hampton, 'The "Objectivity" Ideal and its Limitations in Twentieth Century British Journalism', *Journalism Studies*, 9, 4 (2008), 477-93 (p. 477).

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 489.

Royal Commission on the Press gave its definition of the role of the press as:

Democratic society... needs a clear and truthful account of events, of their background and their causes; a forum for discussion and informed criticism; and a means whereby individuals and groups can express a point of view or advocate a cause. The responsibility for fulfilling these needs unavoidably rests in large measure upon the Press.<sup>190</sup>

The Commission's report was published in 1949, even if it was reflecting on newspapers during and before the war, but there were many signposts towards these ideals in Manchester in 1940. Scott's definitions pointed a reporter in the appropriate direction while setting a benchmark to which Manchester's journalists, both inside and outside the *Guardian's* Cross Street offices, should have aspired.<sup>191</sup> His influence was profound on the journalism of the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Manchester Evening News* and would have been reflected in the reporting of news that was printed to produce a 'balanced newspaper in which liveliness might break through'.<sup>192</sup> There was no equivalent to Scott's pronouncement at the *Evening Chronicle* although Lord Kemsley's view on journalism was articulated to the Royal Commission. He said: 'If a newspaper desires to attain importance and stability it must tell its readers what has happened within the compass over which their interests are spread.'<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p. 101.

<sup>191</sup> Even today *The Guardian's* web comment and opinion pages carry the title 'comment is free', using a phrase from Scott's editorial (<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/uk-edition>>).

<sup>192</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 446.

<sup>193</sup> HMSO, *Royal Commission on the Press 1947-9* (London: HMSO, 1949), p. 102.

### 3.3 Impartiality and Propaganda

If objectivity was an elusive ideal, what about impartiality? News values are affected by the demands of war and while the above set the parameters by which the press hoped to operate, the conflict distorted those values. War, generally, is good news for newspapers. What is being reported has an increased significance, readers have a greater stake in what appears in print and, correspondingly, circulations rise:

Classic warfare is the epitome of a ‘good story’, high in tension and drama, with complex main plots and sub-plots played out within traditional binary oppositions of aggressor and victim, winner and loser. While expensive to cover, warfare is commercially rewarding for the media, since its threat and unfolding ignite insatiable audience appetite for news.<sup>194</sup>

The effect of war on journalism, rather than the economics of journalism, is more complex and was articulated by Knightley. Journalists, he stated, face a dilemma if they wish to observe the military in action and record the first draft of history.<sup>195</sup> He added in a revised edition:

If doing that as objectively and as truthfully as possible means writing and broadcasting stories damaging to their nation’s war effort, what are correspondents to do? Does the journalist within the correspondent prevail? Or the patriot? And what if reporting patriotically involves telling lies? Is that journalism or propaganda?<sup>196</sup>

This is a question that is fundamental to this thesis: was the imperative for journalists between 1939 and 1945 to support the war effort in a ‘deliberate and systematic attempt to shape opinions’ or to hold the authorities to account?<sup>197</sup> And if they did the latter would they be helping or hindering the

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<sup>194</sup> Oliver Boyd-Barrett, ‘Understanding the Second Casualty’, in *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, ed. by S. Allan and B. Zelizer (London: Routledge, 2004), 25-42 (p. 26).

<sup>195</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. xiii.

<sup>196</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, cited in Goldstein, *Journalism and Truth*, p. 82

<sup>197</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 5th edn (London: Sage, 2012), p. 289.



fight against Hitler? With reference to the traditional theories of Walter Lippmann, Harold Lasswell and Edward Bernays, more recent studies have engaged with these questions. Leo Bogart, quoting a report from the former United States Information Agency, wrote: 'It is more important to reach one journalist than 10 housewives or five doctors.'<sup>198</sup> Frank Webster stated that the media are needed for more than reporting acceptable news from the battlefield: 'They are also central players in justifying war itself... especially so in democratic regimes.'<sup>199</sup> Susan Carruthers concurred: 'Consequently, to marshal and maintain morale on one's own side, and attack the opponent's, 'munitions of the mind' were an integral part of total war. Mass media received their call-up along with other vital wartime industries.'<sup>200</sup> Ruling elites, she wrote, echoing Gramsci's theory of hegemony, had to generate support for the conflict and enlisted the media to help bolster the case. Patriotism was the trigger to assure compliance.

This was an important element in the reporting of the Second World War. Nationalism, Michael Howard wrote, is 'indissolubly linked, both in theory and practice, with the idea of war' and Fleet Street interprets this as an inclination to be patriotic.<sup>201</sup> In peacetime, this manifests itself most obviously in sports tournaments like the football World Cup and the Olympic Games, or even in such trivial entertainment events as the

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<sup>198</sup> W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free, 1922), Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (London: Kegan, 1927), E. L. Bernays, *Propaganda*, (New York: Liveright, 1928), republished (New York: Ig, 2005); Leo Bogart, *Cool Words, Cold War: A New Look at USIA's Premises for Propaganda* (University of Michigan: American University Press, 1995) pp. 55-56, cited by Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda*, p. 296.

<sup>199</sup> Frank Webster, 'Information Warfare in an Age of Globalization' in *War and the Media*, ed. by Thussu and Freedman, 57-69 (p. 65).

<sup>200</sup> Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media At War* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 55.

<sup>201</sup> Michael Howard, 'War and Nations', in *Nationalism*, ed. by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 254-7 (p. 254).

*Eurovision Song Contest*. ‘The patriotic imperative lies at the heart of British journalists’ culture,’ Richard Keeble wrote. ‘Not surprisingly this patriotic loyalty appears strongest during times of war.’<sup>202</sup> Simon Cottle argued: ‘National feelings of communal identity, pride, and patriotism, as well as historical parallels and past myths, are all summoned through the genre of war reporting and these generally seek to position “Us” in opposition to “Them”.’<sup>203</sup> With the nation, Benedict Anderson’s imagined community, under attack journalists were inclined to ignore municipal and central government deficiencies under these circumstances and, even if they were not, most of the information they received was slanted because it came from official sources.<sup>204</sup> Piers Robinson noted that research has ‘consistently demonstrated that the media have tended to remain deferential to government positions during times of crisis and war’ and Oliver Boyd-Barrett added that the media typically cover wars from the point of view of the country in which they and their major owners are based.<sup>205</sup> This applied to photographs as well as print, as Barbie Zelizer noted: ‘War is presented as often heroic and reflective of broader aims associated with nationhood, clean and at times antiseptic, and involving sacrifice for the greater good.’<sup>206</sup> Consequently, photographs of dead British soldiers are never published except in the context of their being honoured, and the concurring images are

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<sup>202</sup> Richard Keeble, *Ethics for Journalists*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 98.

<sup>203</sup> Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), p. 77.

<sup>204</sup> Anderson described the nation as an imagined concept in the sense that ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’. (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3rd edn [London: Verso, 2006] p. 6).

<sup>205</sup> Piers Robinson, ‘Researching US Media: State Relations and Twenty-First Century Wars’, in *Reporting War*, ed. by Allan and Zelizer, 96-112 (p.108); Boyd-Barrett, ‘Understanding’, p. 29.

<sup>206</sup> Barbie Zelizer. ‘When War is Reduced to a Photograph’, in *Reporting War*, ed. by Allan and Zelizer, 115-135 (p. 116).

of happy, smiling troops either going off to battle or caught in a moment of triumph.

If the patriotic imperative was not enough to distort normal news values during wars, there were other dominant values. Newspapers have a discourse with their audience, and Stuart Hall's communication model of encoding and decoding is affected when the decoders (the audience) are people who were either giving or risking their lives for the war, or had relatives who were.<sup>207</sup> Even in a modern context this places restrictions on reporting. Certain sections of the press had reservations about the invasion of Iraq in 2003 but not even the most war wary ever manifested their doubts with criticism of the troops. 'Our boys' are close to sacrosanct, and Keeble acknowledged this: 'Journalists tend to be more courageous in criticising the government when British forces are not engaged; when "our boys" (and a few of "our girls") are in action, most of the media tend to back it.'<sup>208</sup> Given that the Second World War had the civilian population on the front line in large numbers for the first time in modern warfare, 'our boys and girls' extended beyond the armed forces and into the roads and avenues of Britain. The exemption from press criticism, the inclination to make references to the heroic whole, followed naturally. This was particularly relevant for the newspapers in the study whose audience was almost entirely locally based. As Jeremy Iggers noted: 'Reporters must cultivate sources and are keenly

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<sup>207</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in *Media Studies: A Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 51-61.

<sup>208</sup> Keeble, *Ethics*, p. 97.

aware that their future access to information depends on how they handle today's story.'<sup>209</sup>

His observation underlined a second dominant force: access to information. Newspaper discourse has tended to be shaped by 'the elements of society that are powerful enough and organized enough to generate press materials, hold press conferences and otherwise garner media attention'.<sup>210</sup> Herman and Chomsky, McNair, Cottle and others have stated that this elite-dominated, top-down model of communication means that reporters are usually reliant on the powerful for their information, particularly in war conditions. Cottle wrote:

The media's dependency on military access, military transport systems, military minders, military briefings, military communication systems and military protection in the military-controlled theatre of war all powerfully contribute to the military's ability to manage and contain the flow and content of journalism reporting.<sup>211</sup>

In reality, Daya Thussu and Des Freedman argued, this meant that although the journalists cherish the idea that they are impartial observers of the armed forces, they are frequently unable to 'shrug off ideological and organisational restrictions to keep a watchful eye on activities of military combatants'.<sup>212</sup>

This complies with Herman and Chomsky's argument that journalism reproduces the views and values of the elite due to a propaganda model by which money and power are able to filter the news to marginalise dissent and 'allow the government and dominant private interests to get

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<sup>209</sup> Jeremy Iggers, *Good News, Bad News: Journalism Ethics and the Public Interest* (Oxford: Westview, 1999), p. 40.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>211</sup> Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*, p. 84.

<sup>212</sup> *War and the Media*, ed. by Thussu and Freedman, p. 5.

their messages to the public’.<sup>213</sup> One of these filters that leads to this manufactured consent stems from practical necessity. Newspapers cannot afford to have reporters everywhere and therefore concentrate on places where they know news stories often happen, the lobby in Parliament being an obvious example, press conferences organised by large organisations another. This leads to the elites – the government, business and ‘experts’ provided by the agents of power – having ready access to the media and excludes marginalised voices. McNair, building on Herman and Chomsky, stated that these filters help construct a propaganda model in which the media’s perceived ability to ‘manage and manipulate public opinion will be used by elites in the pursuit of what they define as the “national interest”’.<sup>214</sup> Given that it was the elites who had most to lose if Germany won the war, the national interest, in their terms, was to continue the fight.

Cottle argued that the propaganda model is more complex than that implies, because codes of conduct and professional norms can lead to interactions between journalists and the sources of power that are not always beneficial to the latter.<sup>215</sup> One part of this elite was largely exempt from this, however, namely the newspaper proprietors, and the influence they wielded on the pages of their newspapers was best summed up by Beaverbrook who told the Royal Commission on the Press in 1948:

I ran the paper [the *Daily Express*] for propaganda, and with no other purpose... The policy is that there shall be no propaganda in the news. There is a strong, stern rule, and the most tremendous attempt...to carry the rule into effect. But we do stumble. It is terrible how we stumble; it is heart-breaking at times.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 1.

<sup>214</sup> McNair, *News and Journalism*, p. 68.

<sup>215</sup> Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*, p. 18.

<sup>216</sup> Royal Commission (Documentary Evidence: Question Session on 18 March 1948), pp. 154-5.

Beaverbrook ‘stumbled’ regularly, most frequently over the issue of the British Empire. When asked by the Commission what would happen if editors had ever taken an alternative stance, he replied: ‘I talked them out of it.’<sup>217</sup> Beaverbrook’s maxim was simple: what was the point of owning a newspaper if you could not influence what appeared in it?<sup>218</sup> Greenslade summed up his attitude as: ‘I am the boss; I have the power; I know best; you editors are the transient holders of office.’<sup>219</sup> A Beaverbrook employee was quoted by Curran and Seaton as saying: ‘Fleet Street... was strewn with the corpses of *Express* editors.’<sup>220</sup> As Harcup argued, journalists are torn between a ‘professional commitment to ethics and truth telling’, yet at the same time are ‘expendable employees expected to produce stories to sell in the marketplace’.<sup>221</sup>

### 3.4 Balance

McNair stated that journalism presents a narrative about the world beyond the experience of the reader: ‘This narrative is asserted to be “true”. The stories told to us by journalists are factual, rather than fictional.’<sup>222</sup> He also argued that that one of the journalist’s tasks is to keep voters informed ‘about the things they need to know’ and to do that balance is required.<sup>223</sup> Yet, in the circumstances listed in the previous section, that key component of Scott’s definition of news values, was impossible. Journalists based in

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<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> Greenslade, *Press Gang*, pp. 7-11.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>220</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 41.

<sup>221</sup> Tony Harcup, *Journalism: Principles and Practice*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2009), p. 217.

<sup>222</sup> McNair, *News and Journalism*, p. 23.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

Germany would have had their reports heavily censored, and their loyalties or motives questioned, as indeed Sir Neville Henderson's were when he served as British ambassador to Berlin between 1937 and 1939 and the press referred to him as 'our Nazi Ambassador in Berlin'.<sup>224</sup> Another deterrent was perception. If reporters for British newspapers had not been arrested for being the enemy by the Gestapo, they would have risked being seen as mouthpieces for Hitler and the Nazis and there would have been the threat of being regarded as traitors. William Joyce, Lord Haw-Haw, whose crime was to broadcast radio propaganda to Britain from Berlin from 1939 to 1945, was hanged for treason in 1946, ironically, as Martin Doherty pointed out, in an act of political propaganda.<sup>225</sup> Keeble suggested that: 'Journalists reporting from Berlin would have been unthinkable during World War Two. Yet during the undeclared Falklands, Gulf and Kosovo wars, British journalists sent dispatches from "enemy" territory, though not without sparking some major controversies.'<sup>226</sup>

Consequently any form of balance was impossible between 1939 and 1945 but reporters, whose lives were put as much at risk by the German bombers as those of their readers, had little personal incentive to seek it and would have incurred the wrath of their editors if they tried. As Steinbeck noted: 'The foolish reporter who broke the rules would not be printed'.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Sir Neville Henderson, *Failure of a Mission* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), pp. 19-20.

<sup>225</sup> Martin A. Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda: Lord Haw-Haw and British Public Opinion in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 184.

<sup>226</sup> Keeble, *Ethics*, p. 102.

<sup>227</sup> Steinbeck, *Once*, cited in Fussell, *Wartime*, p. 286.

#### 4. Newspapers and their Audience

A final question to debate about the discourse between newspapers and their audience is: did the British public believe what they read in their newspapers in 1940 and 1941? The answer is, almost certainly not. Mass Observation reported that, in the early weeks of the war, people said it was ‘useless to buy newspapers since all the front pages were identical and could not be trusted,’ a sentiment underlined by Home Intelligence in May 1940 when it reported: ‘The general curve of distrust of the news has been rising during the last year.’<sup>228</sup> Hylton wrote that the Ministry of Information tried to stem the flow of rumours but were not wholly successful and one explanation for their proliferation (and for the initial high audience figures for Lord Haw-Haw) was that ‘the public did not believe what they were being told by the official media’.<sup>229</sup>

An erosion of trust in newspapers began in the First World War when the troops in the trenches could read what was being written in the press and could compare it to their own experience. Knightley observed:

The effect of this distortion was immense. The average Englishman had been accepting all his life that if something was printed in the newspapers, then it was true. Now, in the biggest event of his life, he was able to check what the press said against what he knew to be the truth. He felt he had found the press out, and as a result he lost confidence in his newspapers, a confidence to this day never entirely recovered.<sup>230</sup>

Yet newspaper circulations rose dramatically between the wars (and during the Second World War) and, as noted earlier, Gannon argued that foreign correspondents assumed a glamorous image akin to secret agents in the 1920s and 1930s, a role that suggested they were believed by some if not all

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<sup>228</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 151; Mass Observation, FR 126.

<sup>229</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

<sup>230</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 105.



their readers. Perhaps the most compelling evidence that newspapers had an influence on their audience is that the government spent so much effort to control what appeared in print.

Bingham wrote that the rise in circulation showed that newspapers were satisfying a need, but with a qualification: 'The journalist did not necessarily believe what he or she wrote, just as the reader did not necessarily believe what he or she read.'<sup>231</sup> This echoed a contemporary report on the press by Home Intelligence that stated: 'In war-time when there is open censorship, everybody accepts that the government can choose what news about the war shall be published.'<sup>232</sup> This thesis will show that many of the reports that appeared in newspapers in the Second World War were written with morale in mind and often amounted to little more than propaganda. Yet the rising circulations would suggest that this, and the entertainment newspapers brought, was what the readers wanted at times other than in the immediate aftermath of serious bombing raids. When they were victims of a Blitz, readers wanted the truth so that others could bear witness to their suffering; at other times reports of resilience and quiet courage were exactly what they required. Ascension Andina-Diaz, citing Lazarsfeld *et al*, argued: 'Most individuals expose themselves most of the time to the kind of material with which they agree to begin with.'<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), p. 11.

<sup>232</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

<sup>233</sup> Lazarsfeld, P.F. and others, 'The Psychology of Voting: An Analysis of Political Behavior' in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, II, ed. by G. Lindzey (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954), cited by Ascension Andina-Diaz, 'Reinforcement vs. Change: The Political Influence of the Media' in *Public Choice*, 131, 1-2 (2007), 65-81, (p. 67).

## 5. Conclusion

The concept of hegemony is normally understood to describe the way in which dominant social groups achieve leadership and control by way of social cohesion and consensus. Jonathan Joseph wrote: 'It argues that the position of the ruling group is not automatically given, but rather that it requires the ruling group to attain consent for its leadership through the construction of political projects and social alliances.'<sup>234</sup> Gramsci, as was seen earlier, asserted that the media play a central role in creating an 'acceptable' consensus, an important concept for this thesis in which newspapers were seen to promote the government's position during the Second World War.<sup>235</sup>

The above, however, appears to complicate this theory that news is not merely an instrument of control but a constant negotiation between internalised and normative experience and the hegemonic imperatives of political elites. This negotiation can break down, but in war, as this chapter has examined, the need to over-ride these tensions becomes imperative. Bingham summed up the general mood in the Second World War thus: 'The idealistic nationalism of 1914 had been rewritten as a cheerfully cynical spirit of defiance against Hitler's attempted domination of Europe' and, as a consequence, Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz became mythologised stories that were embellished by the press with the seeming consent of the readers.<sup>236</sup> Newspapers had not told the truth in the First World War, and they carefully manipulated the facts between 1939 and 1945. In short, for whatever the good reasons for doing so, they gave only

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<sup>234</sup> Jonathan Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>235</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 21-43.

<sup>236</sup> Bingham, *Gender*, pp. 184-85.

one side of the story. With little or no attempt to properly inform the public of an alternative, the myth of resilience was created.

## Part II: Methodology

### Chapter 3

#### Methodology

##### 1. Introduction

The role of the press in the Second World War is frequently overlooked by historians, which is a surprising omission given that, from the outset, newspapers were the main form of communication between the government and its people – a position that would be gradually matched, and even overtaken, by radio during the conflict.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Anderson has stated that the printing press was one of the key factors in the creation of nationhood as an ‘imagined community’, an essential prerequisite in the conducting of war on an industrial and national scale.<sup>2</sup> He added:

Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.<sup>3</sup>

In more recent times, Marie Gillespie wrote that the earliest newspapers connected dispersed people to national discourses and the ‘mass ritual and ceremony of newspaper reading’ contributed to the construction of ideas of national community.<sup>4</sup>

The mythology of 1939-45 was either invented by Fleet Street or considerably advanced by it: the ‘triumph’ of Dunkirk was born in newspaper offices; the ‘few’ of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz spirit were pieces of Churchillian rhetoric that were embellished and given impetus by news pages. Yet, as Bingham observed: ‘Historians have, in fact, generally been reluctant to examine the press for insights into the past.’<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Conboy, *Journalism in Britain*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 5-7

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Marie Gillespie, ‘Transnational Communications and Diaspora Communities’ in *Ethnic Minorities and the Media*, ed. by Simon Cottle (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 164-78 (p. 167).

<sup>5</sup> Bingham, *Gender*, p. 1.

This research seeks to redress the balance in analysis of media coverage by developing a new understanding of how the provincial press reported the Second World War during one of its most crucial periods, analysing the contribution of Manchester's newspapers to the engrained perception of the public reaction to the *Luftwaffe*'s sustained bombing of Britain in 1940 and 1941 that has been encompassed by the phrase 'Blitz Spirit'. The findings have been assessed in the context of the wartime emergency, including government censorship, and the tension between this and some of the traditional imperatives of journalism – for example, notions of the journalist as interpreter of significant events and issues, the journalist as witness, the journalist as watchdog of governments, and the journalist as a provider of the information the public has a right to know.

This is predominantly a qualitative study, which has taken an interpretative and contextual approach to the newspaper headlines and copy, involving analysis of all sections, including news and non-news pages, editorials and readers' letters. Quantitative methods have not been entirely neglected, however, and they are used to measure the proportion of war against non-war reports, the amount of coverage given to lighter items such as entertainment and sport, and to monitor the movement of the news agenda of local and national newspapers away from Manchester and its Blitz of December 1940.

The above combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology conforms to good research practice as stated by Martyn Denscombe, who wrote: 'The use of more than one method can enhance the findings of research by providing a fuller and more complete picture of the thing that is being studied.'<sup>6</sup> On combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, he added: 'At the heart of the approach is that

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<sup>6</sup> Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007), p. 110.

researchers can bring together within a single research project certain elements that have conventionally been treated as an either/or option.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Sources

Three types of primary source have been used to carry out this analysis of Manchester's newspapers, representing, in terms of Hall's communication model, the production (encoding), the texts (reports and headlines), and their reception by the audience (decoding).<sup>8</sup> Editorial archives are patchy but in the case of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News* do exist, albeit in a limited form, in *The Guardian* Archive at Manchester University's John Rylands Library. There are no similar primary documents available for the *Evening Chronicle*. These archives are complemented by the diaries of W. P. Crozier and William Haley, the editors of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News* respectively, although neither is extensive. Crozier's diary, type-written and kept in a loose-leaf folder, runs from October 1940 to February 1941 but is not intimate and is neither a business record nor intended for publication. Ayerst wrote:

The formless jumble of entries, including a few snatches in Latin and Greek, chronicle the progress of his roses, the hunt for cigarettes for his wife and daughter, office rows, university business, the planning of a novel, illness, anxiety over the war, and the time spent in the shelters.<sup>9</sup>

Ayerst concluded that the artlessness of the entries 'reveals the writer' and the nonsense brevity of Haley's diary also is an insight into the man. His summary of the war position in July 1940 was: 'Worlds have happened in the last two months.

Holland, Belgium and France have all gone. Now Great Britain feverishly prepares

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', pp. 51-61.

<sup>9</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 536.

for invasion.’<sup>10</sup> But that was extensive compared to 1943, the entry for which amounted to half an A4 page. The second primary source is the newspapers themselves, the sampling of which appears below. The final type of source material comes from contemporary responses to the Manchester Blitz and to its press coverage (listed below).

## 2.1 Sampling

For the empirical part of the research the focus of the attention is on three newspapers: the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Manchester Evening News* and the *Evening Chronicle*. They were chosen because they dominated the market of the daily regional press in Manchester during the Second World War, in terms of influence, circulation and style, and all three were parts of national newspaper groups, the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News* being owned by the Scott Trust, and the *Evening Chronicle* being printed by Kemsley Newspapers, who also owned the *Sunday Times* the *Daily Disptach* and other national and regional newspapers. The three sampled newspapers represent different deadlines, and different publication pressures, with a national morning newspaper (*Manchester Guardian*) and two evening publications. Other local newspapers were considered but none had the centre-of-Manchester base and geographical reach of the chosen titles and some, such as the *Stockport Express*, came under the umbrella of Kemsley Newspapers and did not differ, in terms of editorial policy, from the *Evening Chronicle*. The *Salford City Reporter* was a small circulation weekly – *The Times* reported it had sales of around 20,000 in 1962 – and the Royal Commission on the Press 1947-1949, ‘the first official, across the board inquiry into the modern press’, did not make reference to the

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<sup>10</sup> Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge University, Sir William John Haley, Diaries and Correspondence 1920-1986, 10 July 1940.

city in its list of daily, Sunday and weekly newspapers, although the smaller towns of Barrow-in-Furness, Nuneaton and Kettering were included.<sup>11</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian's* circulation was modest (51,000 in 1939, rising to 140,000 in 1951), but its influence was far greater and in 1947 Lord Camrose described it as 'one of the famous papers of the world' and 'the widest distribution of any provincial daily'.<sup>12</sup> Its editor, Crozier, met Churchill on a regular basis (Ayerst stated there are records of 16 meetings between October 1939, when they met for the first time, and October 1943), Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary from February 1938 until December 1940, said he read the *Manchester Guardian* every day and the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, an abridged version of the newspaper, gained the *Guardian* an enhanced reputation in the United States.<sup>13</sup> The German edition of the same publication, printed in Berlin, had such an influence that Alexander Werth, the newspaper's foreign correspondent, wrote that the '*Guardian* here counts for more than any other English paper', but it became such an irritant to the Nazi hierarchy that it was suppressed, along with many other newspapers, in 1933.<sup>14</sup> The profits of the *Manchester Evening News* sustained the loss-making *Manchester Guardian* and perhaps that is a reason why the former did not submit circulation numbers before the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> Even its audited figure for 1945, 250,000, is suspiciously rounded but the newspaper rightly described itself as 'the oldest established and

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<sup>11</sup> 'Thomson Acquire Salford Paper', *Times*, 20 February 1962, p. 16; Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 12; Royal Commission, pp. 11, 184.

<sup>12</sup> 1910-1939 figures taken from T. B. Browne's Advertiser's ABC 1910-40; 1951 figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations, cited in Butler and Sloman, *Political Facts*, p. 452; Camrose, *British Newspapers*, p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 544; W. P. Crozier, *Off The Record, Political Interviews 1939-45*, cited in Margach, *Abuse of Power*, p. 83; John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, *Guardian Archive, Papers and Correspondence 1821-1970s*, Crozier to Voigt, 28 July 1938; Gannon, *British Press*, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> *Guardian Archive*, Werth to Crozier, 27 January 1933; Gannon, *British Press*, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* (Profits were never large but the *Manchester Guardian* had sufficient reserves to buy the *Manchester Evening News* in 1924. The *Guardian* ran at a loss throughout the 1930s).



leading evening journal in Manchester'.<sup>16</sup> The *Evening Chronicle* sold more than 200,000 copies a day in the build-up to the war and in 1945 was licensed as selling 224,000.<sup>17</sup> Its title page boasted 'the largest evening sale in the provinces'. The *Chronicle* sold more than the *Evening News* in the outlying Lancashire towns but it never managed to capture the Manchester classified adverts market and in 1963 it was bought by the *Manchester Evening News* and merged into one newspaper.<sup>18</sup>

The research comprises a study of the newspapers from 16 December 1940 to 10 February 1941, a total of 144 editions. In the six-page *Evening Chronicle* of 17 December 1940, which was a typical edition, there were 33 war-based reports and 34 non-war items although only one story related to local incidents. Even six days later, the first edition after the Blitz, there were only two reports on the Manchester bombing and an editorial in the *Evening Chronicle*, again a typical number. These were lengthy, but the relatively low number allowed for extensive scrutiny of every article and for other related items such as official notices, readers' letters, cancellation of sports and leisure events. The study period allows critical reflection on press reports in the week before the Manchester Blitz and for seven weeks afterwards, monitoring whether there was a change in the reporting before and after the bombings of 22/23 and 23/24 December. The newspapers after the Blitz also provide evidence of the local press's willingness to investigate any national and local authority shortcomings exposed by the extreme circumstances brought about by severe bombing. Manchester also suffered another night's bombing during this seven weeks. The study period also coincides with the suppression of the *Daily Worker*, an important moment in the evolving relationship between the government and the press.

Particular attention is paid to the editions of 23 to 27 December 1940, the first

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<sup>16</sup> Seymour-Ure, *British Press*, pp. 274-76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Greenslade, *Press Gang*, pp. 111-12.

three after the first Manchester Blitz, when the *Luftwaffe* was still targeting the city, strains on reporting would have been at their greatest, but when news could be gathered from just outside the newspapers' front doors (production of the *Manchester Guardian* was disrupted when the office was hit by incendiary bombs).<sup>19</sup> Journalists were not just using news agencies, subject to the gate-keeping of the censor, but also would have had direct access to eye-witness accounts. Their reporting is compared to articles that were subject to greater restraints. The length of the study period and the number of editions conforms to Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman's framework for qualitative analysis in that the sample 'should be likely to generate rich information on the type of phenomena which need to be studied'.<sup>20</sup>

The quantitative analysis of the proportions of hard news to entertainment, is applied to the eight Tuesday editions of the three newspapers beginning 17 December 1940. Tuesday was chosen because Monday and Saturday editions are inclined to look backwards at, or forward to, the weekend, and consequently are frequently more entertainment focused, and Wednesday and Thursday papers would have had gaps in the analysis due to Christmas and New Year holidays. Friday was an alternative but was rejected because it would not have provided a proper perspective of a subsequent raid that finished in the early hours of Friday 10 January 1941. This study is conducted in the knowledge that entertainment would normally be given a greater priority by news desks during a holiday period but, while the edition of 17 December 1940 might have been affected by this seasonal aberration, this would have been more than compensated for by the gravity and importance of the local news in the aftermath of the Blitz. Entertainment news had strong competition for space in already ration-restricted newspapers so its inclusion was a strong indicator of the journalist's

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<sup>19</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 541.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd edn, (London: Sage, 1994), p. 34.

perception of the audience's desire to escape the war. Or even a propagandist's wish to cheer up people. As Bingham stated, readers tend to select the paper that most closely fits their own preconceptions:

Neither the editors nor the audience, nor indeed the advertisers, were likely to get exactly what they wanted, but there was a set of 'feedback loops' between each of them, in the form of sales figures and market research, which ensured that each party had some input into the newspaper.<sup>21</sup>

Those loops did not wholly take into account the negative feelings of the people of Manchester in the immediate aftermath of Christmas 1940, and in any case they move at a slow pace rather than immediately, but as no newspaper was willing to confront these issues, there were no circulation or financial implications attached to this exclusion. This is examined later in the thesis.

## 2.2. Approaching the Newspapers

At the heart of the research are the newspapers themselves. Using John Richardson as a guide, critical discourse analysis is applied to study the 'interpretations of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features and deriving meaning from this'.<sup>22</sup> What is printed in newspapers needs to be judged against what else was in the news that day; where and how reports appear in the newspaper; and what other lines of inquiry were ignored or under-exploited. Journalism, according to Richardson, is inescapably connected to the social, political and cultural context in which it is written and consumed and he produced a list of questions that should be asked when examining newspapers.<sup>23</sup> These are:

- Where has the information in this article come from?

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<sup>21</sup> Bingham, *Gender*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> John Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers. An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 221.

- Is there a reason why this information was provided to journalists on the day, or the instant that it was? Does releasing this story cover up a more significant story?
- What are the relations between this text and systems such as markets, ownership, advertising, government, the law and religious beliefs?
- How much power and social influence does the focus, or subjects of the story have?
- Is there a customary or habitually used constellation of representations associated with stories on this subject? Are these negative or positive?
- Who, if anyone, is 'othered' by the reporting? That is, whom does the report construct as 'Us' and who are 'They'? Are any of 'Them' represented as part of 'Us' in other reporting contexts? What are the possible reasons for this?
- What are the possible social consequences of reporting?
- Specifically, who benefits and who loses – or may be harmed – from coverage of this sort?<sup>24</sup>

Using this as a framework, all reports on the Manchester Blitz are analysed both individually and in the context of the copy elsewhere in the editions in which they appear.

A typical application of the above could be used on the front page of the Late Night edition in August 1944 of *The Star*, a London evening newspaper in competition with the *Evening Standard* and *Evening News* in the 1940s. There were only five reports and each concentrated on foreign news, including the second lead headlined 'Nazis race for Seine "Dunkirk"'.<sup>25</sup> There are a number of discourses in operation here, some of them contradictory. As British newspapers had used Dunkirk as a metaphor for snatching victory from defeat in 1940 was the reader to conclude that the Germans were staging an unexpected rally? Or, was *The Star* making assumptions that its target audience had grown to question, or never properly subscribed to, the 'Bloody Marvellous' narrative being pedalled in the *Daily Mirror* and elsewhere Fleet Street four years previously and 'Dunkirk' had become a

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 222.

<sup>25</sup> 'Nazis race for Seine "Dunkirk"'. *The Star*, 23 August 1944, p. 1.

convenient label to signify a serious military reverse?<sup>26</sup> The quotation marks around Dunkirk, albeit derived from a non-attributed phrase in the copy, signalled a potential deviation from the previously accepted meaning of the word and the sub-headline – ‘Their retreat is now a rout’ – removed all doubt. Given that Dunkirk has assumed a mythical status in British press folklore, there were social implications from this change of narrative. Below the headlines the copy read:

The Seventh German Army has completely collapsed as a fighting force, and we are all out in pursuit of what remains of this once formidable army as the Germans race for the Seine, where hurried preparations have been made for an ‘inland Dunkirk’.

The ‘their’ in the headline and the ‘we’ in the copy underline the abandonment of objectivity and the ‘othering’ in the report, but there is another, more subtle, sign of bias. The reporter (the above ‘we’ suggested the journalist was with the pursuing forces) wrote that German army was not just retreating, it had ‘completely collapsed’ to the point the reporter could write dismissively of ‘what remains’ and ‘hurried preparations’ for a retreat. An alternative report could have used the word ‘regrouping’ and, as the Seventh Army would play a role in the major German offensive, the Battle of the Bulge, four months later, it would possibly have been the more accurate description.<sup>27</sup>

All reports in the Manchester newspapers during the study period were examined in this manner to see if they abandoned reporting norms explored in the previous chapter. The standard format for news reports is the inverted pyramid ‘which places the most important information at the head of the story and uses the lead paragraph to answer the five ‘W questions’: Who? What? Why? Where? And

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Bloody Marvellous’, *Daily Mirror*, 1 June 1940, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: The Official History of the Battle of the Bulge* (St Petersburg, FL: Red and Black, 2011).

When?’<sup>28</sup> Lasswell is credited with developing the five Ws model of communication in 1948 but, even though his work was published after the period of study, war and non-war reports in the Manchester newspapers generally followed the journalistic convention that White described as the ‘order of meaning’?<sup>29</sup> A typical example was printed in the *Manchester Evening News* on 17 December 1940:

Another German spy [WHO] was executed [WHAT] in London [WHERE] today [WHEN]. He was associated with Waldberg and Meier, the two spies who were hanged in Pentonville a week ago. Like them he was equipped with a wireless set [WHY].<sup>30</sup>

There are other forms of news construction, such as the delayed drop, where the five ‘W questions’ appear below paragraphs setting the scene, or more literary forms of newspaper journalism in which the report ‘invariably starts with a pronoun such as “it”, “he”, “she” or “they”’.<sup>31</sup> Neither was common in news reports in the 1940s, and any deviation from the normal ‘order of meaning’ is an indicator of unusual pressures on, or priorities of, the reporter or sub-editor. Emphasis on the bravery of the fire fighters placed high in a story about Blitz deaths would be a typical example.

Wodak and Michael Meyer, citing Teun Van Dijk, described one dimension of critical discourse analysis as ‘the extension of linguistics beyond sentence grammar towards a study of action and interaction’ and what failed to appear in reports, casualty figures for example, is also significant.<sup>32</sup> Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang argued that academics should be interested not only in what the ‘media convey’, but also in ‘what they leave out’. They added: ‘The topics, events, facts, issues, arguments, personalities, and political figures that never made it to this public forum have

<sup>28</sup> B. Franklin and others, *Key Concepts in Journalism Studies* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Power and Personality* (New York: Norton, 1948), pp. 33-51; H. White, ‘The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality’, in *On Narrative*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 5-27 (p. 9).

<sup>30</sup> ‘Third Nazi Spy Executed’, *Manchester Evening News*, 17 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> A. Blundy, *The Bad News Bible* (London: Review, 2004), p. 181; Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers*, p. 72.

<sup>32</sup> T. A. Van Dijk, *Discourse Studies*, 5 vols, (London: Sage, 2007), cited in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2009), p. 2.

consequences, short-term and long-range.’<sup>33</sup> This is particularly important in the context of wartime rationing of newsprint that reduced newspapers to between four and 10 pages in length.

Critical discourse analysis was chosen as the principal methodology because it revealed what was written or said, and asked why? Richardson argued that this theory and method of newspaper analysis allowed academics to apply a interpretative, contextual and constructivist approach:

What this means is that critical discourse analysts: offer interpretations of the meanings of texts rather than just quantifying textual features and deriving meaning from this; situate what is written or said in the context in which it occurs, rather than just summarising patterns or regularities in texts; and argue that textual meaning is constructed through an interaction between producer, text and consumer rather than simply being ‘read off’ the page by all readers in exactly the same way.<sup>34</sup>

An example was a report in the *Manchester Guardian* in December 1940 that stated ‘several incendiaries fell in a square near to a war memorial’.<sup>35</sup> A grid of words would have noted ‘incendiaries’, ‘memorial’ and ‘war’ but would not have logged the mock outrage of the reporter or sub-editor. Anderson noted that ‘no more arresting emblems of modern nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers’ but no bomber several thousand feet in the air in the dark would have aimed at such a militarily meaningless target and, in any case, the memorial was not hit.<sup>36</sup> This is a conventional propagandist technique as described by Stig-Arne Nohrstedt *et al* in which conflict is described in polarized terms: good and bad. They added: ‘So a discourse dominated by propaganda will consequently only allow two positions: for

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<sup>33</sup> Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, ‘Personal Influence and the New Paradigm: Some Inadvertent Consequences’ in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 608, 1 (2006), 157-178 (p. 171).

<sup>34</sup> Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers*, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Night Raid on North-West’, *Manchester Guardian*, 23 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 9.

and against. Attempts or claims to take a third position – a distanced, neutral or critical standpoint – will be effectively suppressed.’<sup>37</sup>

Donald Matheson has argued that war requires a vocabulary to sustain it, however, so study of the semiotics of the language is important:

Organised violence depends on language to organise it at every level, from conceiving of state-sanctioned violence to planning and giving orders, and it depends on language to justify it through philosophy, heroic stories and the construction of notions such as national honour and the dishonourable enemy.<sup>38</sup>

The analysis will focus on the words used in headlines and in copy using linguistic concepts and tools. Words can contain value judgements as well as the dictionary meanings and Billig argued that ‘nationalism is not confined to the florid language of blood-myths’, but also operates in ordinary and commonly used expressions. He wrote: ‘Small words, rather than the grand memorable phrases, offer constant, but barely conscious reminders of the homeland.’<sup>39</sup> This was demonstrated when the *Guardian Weekly* conducted an analysis of the words used by journalists during the Gulf War in 1991:

**They have**  
A war machine  
Censorship  
Propaganda

**They**  
Destroy  
Kill  
Kill

**They launch**  
Sneak attacks  
Without provocation

**Their men are...**  
Brainwashed

**We have**  
Army, navy and air force  
Reporting restrictions  
Press briefings

**We**  
Suppress  
Eliminate  
Neutralise

**We launch**  
First strikes  
Pre-emptively

**Ours are...**  
Professional

<sup>37</sup> S. A. Nohrstedt and others, ‘From the Persian Gulf to Kosovo – War Journalism and Propaganda’, *European Journal of Communication*, 15, 3 (2000), 383-404 (p. 384).

<sup>38</sup> Donald Matheson, *Media Discourses. Analysing Media Texts* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 93.



Cowardly  
Desperate

Cautious  
Confident<sup>40</sup>

The alternative word in the pairings could have been used for the other in each case, depending on the personal views of the writer, and is a clear indicator of the multi-functional nature of linguistic semiotics that was apparent in 1940 as it was half a century later. This subjectivity is most evident in the headlines, which are designed to attract a reader to a report and, in trying to reveal the most newsworthy and eye-catching element in the story they accompany, do not have time to address the issue of balance even on the rare occasions the reporter or sub-editor would attempt to include it in his/her copy during a war. Headlines perform a double function, 'a semantic function regarding the referential text, and a pragmatic function regarding the reader (the receiver) to whom the text is addressed. The two functions are simultaneous'.<sup>41</sup> This focus will be on the representations the words in the headlines convey: 'The various types of verb process (mental, verbal, relational, transitive and intransitive action) aren't just syntactically different, they also carry differences of meaning – that is semantic differences – between processes and hence between differing clauses.'<sup>42</sup> The text below the headlines is also analysed.

Van Dijk's ideological square is characterised by positive self-representation and negative representation of others and if this applied to newspaper reports:

We may expect that Our good actions and Their bad ones will in general tend to be described at a lower, more specific level, with many (detailed) propositions. The opposite will be true for Our bad actions and Their good ones, which, if described at all, will both be described in rather general, abstract and hence 'distanced' terms, without giving much detail.<sup>43</sup>

In war, as the previous chapters have shown, there are imperatives which make Van

<sup>40</sup> *Guardian*, 23 January 1991. Cited in Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> E. Iarovici and R. Amel, 'The Strategy of Headlines', *Semiotica*, 77-4 (1989), p. 441.

<sup>42</sup> Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers*, p. 197.

<sup>43</sup> T. A. Van Dijk, 'Opinions and Ideologies in the Press' in *Approaches to Media Discourse*, ed. by Allan Bell and Peter Garrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 21-63 (p. 35).

Dijk's theory the default position in newspapers, in Jowett and O'Donnell words, using language that 'tends to deify a cause and satanize opponents'.<sup>44</sup> The copy is also examined for references that represent the values and characteristics of the British and the Germans. Martin Reisigl and Wodak describe these as predication strategies, 'the very basic process and result of linguistically assigning qualities to persons, animals, objects, events and social phenomena'.<sup>45</sup> A typical example appeared in the *Manchester Evening News* in December 1940. Under the headline 'A. F. S. men machine-gunned', a story alleging that, after dropping their bombs, 'Nazi planes swooped low and tried to machine-gun some of the firemen'.<sup>46</sup> Nobody is quoted to substantiate this story and German gunners, faced with a long flight home, would have been more likely to have wanted to conserve ammunition for possible encounters with British fighters. Nevertheless, the reporter has assigned bad actions perpetrated against the good of the fire fighters.

Language is an indicator of subjectivity but where reports appear and what projection they receive is also a potentially important indicator of a lack of objectivity or symptoms of censorship. 'The design of a newspaper page, especially a news page, is its own menu,' Allen Hutt and Bob James wrote, while F. W. Hodgson put it simply: 'The order which headlines appear on a page, and their size, signify the relative importance of the text in relation to the other items.'<sup>47</sup> The lead story on the main news page of relatively few words is more likely to receive attention and be read than a long report buried low down on the Foreign News page deep inside a newspaper. When the Manchester Blitz was not the lead story in a Manchester

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<sup>44</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda*, p. 303.

<sup>45</sup> M. Reisigl and R. Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Anti-Semitism* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 54.

<sup>46</sup> 'A. F. S. Men Machine-Gunned', *Manchester Evening News*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Allen Hutt and Bob James, *Newspaper Design Today* (London: Lund Humphries, 1989), p. 12; F. W. Hodgson, *New Subediting* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998), p. 35.

newspaper, this can be an indicator of censorship. Why this would happen is explored later in the thesis.

The column centimetres usually reflect the importance that the newspaper attaches to the article, although not always (as above), and there is a quantitative study of the amount of coverage of the war compared to other news stories, features and entertainment. This is done by analysing the number of stories, and the percentage of the newspaper they represent, allocating to seven categories: war news; non-war news; comment; entertainment and sport; business; cartoons and photographs; and advertisements. The findings are considered alongside the survey undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Press published in 1949 that analysed newspaper coverage in *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* in 1927, 1937 and 1947.<sup>48</sup>

It is important to take into account the expectations placed on the *Manchester Guardian*, which had a national audience and the consequent journalistic obligations that implied, but Manchester's local newspapers also devoted considerable space in ration-reduced editions to the capital. Haley, editor of the *Manchester Evening News* during the war and a future editor of *The Times* and Director General of the BBC, stated: 'Only London mattered.' So, rather than self-restriction, was this kind of attitude simply the adoption of 'metropolitan values' by the Northern editorial/proprietary elite?<sup>49</sup> Haley's comment, while not conclusive, suggests this was the case but a quantitative analysis is undertaken to chart the Manchester Blitz's fall down the news agenda. This is done by enumerating the references in the three newspapers to the bombing and Manchester from 24 December to the end of the study period. While local newspapers have a different audience and would be expected to

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<sup>48</sup> Royal Commission, p. 249.

<sup>49</sup> Woods Papers, 5 September 1963, cited in Koss, *Rise and Fall*, p. 388.

linger longer on Manchester stories, their coverage is compared to that of *The Times*, the *Daily Mirror* and, to give a hyper-local perspective, the *Salford City Reporter*.

### 2.3. Contemporary Accounts

A fuller picture of how Manchester print journalism functioned in the face of the Blitz is drawn by comparing what appeared in newsprint to other, sometimes private, contemporary accounts. Interviews with senior journalists of the time were impossible because the nature of the call-up meant that only those who were older than fighting age or unfit for service remained in the UK to make the key decisions concerning newspaper content.<sup>50</sup> Paper shortages imposed by war rationing may have contributed to the relatively few memos that were available, but the distinctive editorial structure, in UK national newspaper terms, of the *Manchester Guardian* where decisions had to be relayed between Cross Street, Manchester, and the London office meant there was important correspondence.<sup>51</sup>

As Crozier was the editor in chief of the *Manchester Guardian* and set editorial policy, memos to and from him and his responses to readers' letters are examined in detail. *The Guardian* Archive has his correspondence from 1932 to his death in 1944 but as the focus of this study is the period from December 1940 to February 1941 and the censorship framework was erected from the moment war was declared, greatest attention is paid to the period from the beginning of 1939 to the end of 1941. This allowed scrutiny of every one of his memos, many of them routine or mundane, but also containing responses to key moments, including Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia, the countdown to conflict and the frequent interventions of the censor in the opening months of the war. The period in the 12

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<sup>50</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 505.

<sup>51</sup> *Guardian* Archive.

months after the Manchester Blitz also allowed time for Crozier and his staff to reflect on the *Manchester Guardian's* coverage in what was a vital moment in the city's history. Importantly for this thesis, the two-year examination period provides prime examples of self-censorship by Crozier.

The editor's memos were complemented by the study of the correspondence of the London editor James Bone and the newspaper's war correspondent Evelyn Montague, representing the most important actors in the *Manchester Guardian's* coverage of the war in 1940 and 1941. This correspondence is sparse – there is only one surviving memo from Bone to Crozier written during the war – and there were similar limitations regarding Haley's correspondence. Although he was editor of the *Manchester Evening News*, his appointment as general manager for the newspaper group meant his memos largely related to logistics rather than editorial policy. A typical memo to him from Crozier was:

Our three drivers who will be taking the papers to the stations ought to have some head protection if possible. I know the great difficulty of getting steel helmets, but is it possible that there may be three ARP officials in the office who could do without helmets better than drivers? I should say that these drivers merit head protection almost more than anyone else.<sup>52</sup>

Other memos involving Haley referred to paper shortages, distribution difficulties and such like. Nevertheless, elsewhere in the archive, there are later memos beyond 1941 where Crozier referred to interventions from the censor and to verbal conversations in the offices of the *Manchester Guardian*. These, in conjunction with the more pertinent material from Crozier *et al*, not only gave contemporary views but also revealed occasions when reports were spiked (rejected) or altered because of government or self-censorship. Biographies and autobiographies of journalists, editors and proprietors were also studied, although the latter could not be considered

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<sup>52</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Haley, 20 September 1940.

impartial and were always written with the benefit of hindsight. 'This is not history; this is my case,' Winston Churchill said when he described his account of 1939-45, *The Second World War*.<sup>53</sup>

Other contemporary accounts from non-journalists were studied.

Consideration was given to conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with people who had been alive during Manchester's Blitz. Historians of the Holocaust have used oral history to radically shift perceptions, but, while the dreadful events in concentration camps would be burned on memories, the sharpness of recollections of more mundane day-to-day existence might be questionable in people who would be aged at least 85 now. There is also a doubt about the value of the views of people who would have been children or in their teens at the time and who may well have been sheltered from the grimmest news and darkest feelings by their parents. They would also have lacked an adult perception of the reporting in their newspapers. Instead, a variety of documentary sources, including contemporary written material, were examined, testing the accuracy of newspapers' representation of popular morale and the extent to which editors and journalists correctly judged the popular mood in the way they reported the Manchester Blitz. This process was completed partly through the study of archive material at the Mass Observation Project, based at the University of Sussex, which has contemporary reports from diarists in Manchester. These were relatively short engagements and virtually everything the diarists wrote pertinent to their collection of material and the city's reaction to the Blitz is included in this thesis.<sup>54</sup> There is also a small archive of Mancunian recollections at Stockport Library, Greater Manchester, which have been published on-line by the BBC as part of its *WW2 People's War* compilation. These recollections were compiled more than

<sup>53</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, VIII, Never Despair: 1945-65*, 2nd edn (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 315; Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (London: Cassell, 1952).

<sup>54</sup> Mass Observation, University of Sussex.

60 years after the event, with all the potential for memory to be airbrushed by nostalgia that time span can imply, and while many revealed the usual narrative of fortitude, they also contained a significant number of accounts that suggested there were more complex responses that spoke of fear, anger and the questioning of whether continuing to wage war against Hitler was worth the suffering.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, there was a series of weekly reports compiled, via the resources of Home Intelligence, by the Ministry of Information and distributed to the War Cabinet. These are also to be found at the University of Sussex and, importantly for this thesis, included a report on the morale of the Manchester public conducted in January 1941, just days after the Christmas Blitz.<sup>56</sup> This is used extensively as it is an official document that would have been read by the Cabinet or officials close to it and the team of government reporters would have had no obvious reason to be biased. This report also included an appendix in which a Mancunian gave a detailed account of her reaction to the destruction. Again, virtually all her report is included in the thesis. The archive also includes a Home Intelligence report on the press written in May 1940 that monitored the public's trust in their newspapers, why they read them and the demographics of the reading public. This report is also used extensively.

The research findings from this study, showing that popular perceptions of the time frequently countered the accepted version of British attitudes to the Blitz, particularly the Home Intelligence report on Manchester's morale referred to above, are compared to analysis of the selected contemporary newspapers in order to produce overall answers to the key questions at the heart of the thesis. Particular attention is given to newspaper reports with headlines that appeared to provide negative case

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<sup>55</sup> BBC, People's War <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar>> [accessed 25-31 May 2008].

<sup>56</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

analysis but, even though they hinted at criticism of the authorities in the aftermath of the Manchester Blitz, the copy below did not back up these headlines.

### 3. The Limits of the Research

This thesis provides new analysis of the reporting of the war in an important provincial British city that would have become the national print centre if Fleet Street had been rendered inoperable. It focuses on the three newspapers that dominated the local market in Manchester. In 1940 and 1941 between them they sold more than 500,000 copies every day to a population of between double and treble that figure.<sup>57</sup> Even allowing for the geographical spread of the circulation that reached into outlying towns such as Bolton and Rochdale, this meant that the *Manchester Guardian*, *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle*'s penetration into the local market was extensive. The research could have extended to other evening newspapers in the Greater Manchester area, for example the *Bolton Evening News* or *Oldham Chronicle*, but they did not have the influence and circulation (65,000 and 25,000 respectively in 1945) of the chosen sample.<sup>58</sup> Also neither the Bolton nor the Oldham newspapers had a central Manchester base at Christmas 1940 and, with the city's infrastructure severely damaged by the bombing, would have had logistical difficulties getting ready access to the victims of the Blitz. The experience, too, would not have been comparable as Bolton had only one air raid when Punch Street and Ardwick Street were attacked in 1941 and Oldham had only two of serious note, in 1941 and 1945, when 27 people were killed on each occasion.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Census of Great Britain 1841-1931*, cited in Steven J. Fielding, 'The Irish Catholics of Manchester and Salford: Aspects of Their Religious and Political History, 1890-1939', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1988), p. 347.

<sup>58</sup> Audit Bureau of Circulations <<http://www.abc.org.uk>> [accessed 16 November 2012].

<sup>59</sup> Bolton's War, *Bolton Remembers the War* <<http://www.boltonswar.org.uk/t-blackout.htm#berry>> [accessed 23 November 2012]; Janice Barker, 'The Day War Broke Out' (*Oldham Evening Chronicle*,



Thought was also given to making a direct comparison between Manchester and Liverpool's newspapers. Liverpool suffered more raids than any British city other than London and had a comparable population (856,000) and demography to Manchester.<sup>60</sup> It also had three daily newspapers, the morning *Liverpool Post*, and two evenings, the *Liverpool Echo* and *Liverpool Evening Express*, although it was not a national newspaper print centre like Manchester and had a far more local focus. But Liverpool, other British cities and local newspapers in the Second World War are worthy of a separate study.

The three chosen newspapers represent a narrow spectrum of political opinion. The *Manchester Guardian* had supported the Liberal Party but, unlike the *News Chronicle*, had distanced itself when the party disintegrated after the First World War.<sup>61</sup> By 1939 it had no political allegiance, although A. P. Wadsworth, a future editor, articulated an editorial policy that pledged the paper to Churchill, who had 'the boldness, the imagination, the sense of social justice, the capacity to rouse the enthusiasm and devoted service that we need'.<sup>62</sup> The *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle*, in common with most provincial and weekly newspapers, showed no obvious support to any political party, preferring 'journalism of consensus', although the former's link with the *Guardian* would make it liberal-leaning, while the latter's regular political commentator was the Conservative Party MP Beverley Baxter, who had an unofficial post with the Ministry of Aircraft Production where he was responsible for keeping up production of aero-engines.<sup>63</sup>

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2009) <<http://www.oldham-chronicle.co.uk/news-features/8/news/29219/the-day-war-broke-out>> [accessed 28 November 2012].

<sup>60</sup> Beaven and Thoms, *Civilian Morale*, p. 196; Demographia <<http://www.demographia.com>> [accessed 19 November 2012].

<sup>61</sup> Gannon, *British Press*, p. 75.

<sup>62</sup> 'Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 535.

<sup>63</sup> Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, 'Op-ed Pages', in *Pulling Newspapers Apart: Analysing Print Journalism*, ed. by Bob Franklin, (London, Routledge, 2008), 67-74 (p. 72).

The fact that his views were printed despite his lack of local connections – he was a Canadian and represented the constituency of Wood Green in north London – suggests his opinions did not differ significantly from the editorial policy. None of the papers in this study was among the most strident in terms of support for the main political parties and, although this is addressed in part by holding up the findings against *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror*, newspapers which tended to be Conservative and Labour by nature if not by proclamation, a more rigorous study of left-wing publications, for example, would include the *Daily Herald*, which supported the Labour Party, and the *Daily Worker*, which was set up in 1930 to support the Communist Party.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, the length of the study period could have been extended. Manchester and Salford suffered sporadic bombing throughout the Second World War, most notably in June 1941 when 14 nurses were killed after bombs landed on Salford Royal Hospital. The death rate and the damage were not comparable, however, and the strain on the local infrastructure was not as heavy. Nevertheless, there is scope for further study tracking the change of tone in Manchester's newspapers as the fear of invasion receded and the mood changed from *if* the war could be won to *when*?<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Royal Commission, p. 359.

<sup>65</sup> Hardy, Cooper and Hochland, *Manchester at War*, p. 44.

## Part III: Results and Analysis

### Chapter 4

#### Manchester: Its Blitz and its Newspapers

##### 1. Introduction

Manchester and Salford entered the Second World War with a combined population of around a million. The census of the cities in 1931 counted 766,378 and 223,438 people respectively and, although the 1941 census was not undertaken because of the hostilities, those numbers grew by the time war was declared.<sup>1</sup> In 1949 the Royal Commission on the Press estimated the population of greater Manchester as 1.5 million, rising to 2.25 million if the outlying Bolton, Oldham, Stockport, Bury and Rochdale were included.<sup>2</sup> There was a significant Catholic presence, amounting to 130,000 or 13 per cent in 1931, including around 800 Italians in Ancoats, an area just north of the city centre, while Bill Williams stated there was a 40,000-strong Jewish community in Manchester in 1933, although this also grew before the war because 8,000 refugees came to the city to escape Nazism from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, most of them Jews.<sup>3</sup>

The city attracted immigrants, according to Louis Hayes in 1840, because of its tolerance towards foreigners:

Our foreign trade brings us into contact with most nationalities, and makes us probably more cosmopolitan in our views... Manchester makes no distinction as to creed or race. She opens her portals and offers an equal chance to all those who wish to settle here to trade and get gain.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fielding, 'Irish Catholics', p. 347

<sup>2</sup> Royal Commission, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Fielding, 'Irish Catholics', p. 52; Paul de Felice, 'Reconstructing Manchester's Little Italy', in *Manchester Region History Review*, 12, 1998, 54-65 (p. 56); Bill Williams, *Jews and Other Foreigners: Manchester and the Rescue of the Victims of European Fascism, 1933-40* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 11, 435.

<sup>4</sup> Louis M. Hayes, *Reminiscences of Manchester and Some of its Surroundings from the Year 1840* (Manchester: 1905), cited in Williams, *Jews*, p. 2.

This may have been the case in the mid nineteenth century, yet in the 1930s the membership of the British Union of Fascists was sufficiently large in Manchester that Sir Oswald Mosley considered moving his headquarters from London to the city.<sup>5</sup> The support for the BUF dissipated rapidly on the outbreak of war and a swing in the city's sentiments by June 1940 might be detected in that riots broke out in Little Italy in Ancoats when Mussolini allied with Germany and invaded France.<sup>6</sup> Most of the city's Italian males in a community described by Williams as 'subsisting largely as itinerant ice-cream sellers, barrel organists and manual workers' in Ancoats and academics, lawyers and entrepreneurs dotted elsewhere in the city, were interned in Bury and many died when the *Arandora Star* was sunk the following month.<sup>7</sup> The thesis will return to this subject in Chapter 7.

Home Intelligence's verdict on 1940s Manchester was less than flattering.<sup>8</sup> When its observers visited the city in the January after the Christmas Blitz it found morale to be low, but their criticism extended beyond the immediate difficulties to pre-war attitudes. Describing Manchester as an 'uncoordinated, topographically incoherent, overlapping, jumbled up nondescript place', their report continued: 'Even at the best of times Manchester feeling and a positive Manchester outlook are liable to be lacking.'<sup>9</sup> The inspectors added:

Long before the war competent observers were saying that there was a noticeable strain of selfishness and strict utilitarianism in Manchester. And in the last few months several people have pointed out the tendency for Manchester people to stop work at the slightest siren, sleep all night in shelters long before the Blitz, etc.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

As Iggers noted earlier, Manchester newspapers might have wished to gloss over or ignore ‘local jealousies’ because highlighting them would have been seen as an attack on their target audience, but this thesis will show later that they also failed to pursue incidents of local authority incompetence. There were reasons for this, as the previous chapters have discussed, but this contradicted a basic tenet endorsed in the training and practices of journalists, namely holding those in authority to account.

## 2. The Bombing of Manchester

The raid on Coventry in November 1940 not only allowed Nazi propaganda to add *Coventration* or *Coventried* to the war-time vocabulary, it highlighted a change in tactics by the *Luftwaffe* which extended its bombing of London to Britain’s provincial centres.<sup>11</sup> Birmingham was attacked on 25 October, and Glasgow, Plymouth, Coventry, Bristol, Southampton, Merseyside, Manchester and Sheffield followed.<sup>12</sup> The Germans began the war directing bombers by a radio device named the *Knickerbein*, but when the British jammed the beams, they revised their methods and pathfinder forces were sent out to light the way for the heavy bombers with incendiaries.<sup>13</sup> Coventry was the first city to be attacked using the new method.

The first raid of the Manchester Blitz occurred on 22-23 December 1940, a Sunday night and Monday morning, when 149 aircraft of *Luftflotte 3* and 121 of *Luftflotte 2* dropped 272 tons of high-explosive bombs and 37,152 incendiaries.<sup>14</sup> The attacks, concentrating on the western side of the city, the docks and industrial areas of Trafford Park and Salford, lasted from 7.45 pm to 1.20 am and again from 2 am to

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<sup>11</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, p.148.

<sup>12</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. 36,

<sup>13</sup> Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now*, p. 628; R. V. Jones, *Most Secret War: British Scientific Intelligence, 1939-1945* (London: Coronet, 1979), p. 177.

<sup>14</sup> It is also known locally as the Christmas Blitz (see Chris Perkins and Martin Dodge, ‘Mapping the Imagined Future: The Roles of Visual Representation in the 1945 City of Manchester Plan’, *Professional Geographer* 59, 1 (2007): 22-34 (p. 31); Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now*, p. 351.

6.55 am.<sup>15</sup> Guided to the target area by fires still burning in Liverpool and Birkenhead from raids the previous night, more than 400 fires were started, 100 of which were serious, and within two hours the glare of the fires was visible to crews flying over London.<sup>16</sup> The very large number of incendiary bombs dropped on the city, particularly before 3 am, and a shortage of civilian defence staff, who had been transferred to help in Liverpool the previous day, presented a multitude of problems and although there was no shortage of water it was not possible to extinguish them all before nightfall the following evening.<sup>17</sup> Trafford Park was particularly badly affected and the main bus station and both the city's main railways stations, Central and London Road (now Manchester Piccadilly), were hit.

At times another Coventry seemed to be threatened and people living near Withy Grove [where the *Evening Chronicle* was based] risked death by deserting their own surface and Anderson shelters to seek greater protection afforded them beneath the largest of all provincial newspaper offices. Difficult as conditions were, none could be refused shelter that night and the refugees crowded on to the benches while the cramped sub-editors went about their job preparing for the morning's newspapers.<sup>18</sup>

The following night, 23-24 December, 171 aircraft of *Luftflotte 3* dropped 195 tons of high explosive and 7,020 incendiary bombs between 7.15 pm and midnight bringing the Mancunian casualty list to an estimated 684 people dead and 2,364 wounded.<sup>19</sup> Of the famous buildings in the centre of Manchester, the following were severely damaged: Free Trade Hall; Victoria Buildings; Rates Office; Cross Street Chapel; Manchester Cathedral; Chetham's Hospital; Masonic Temple; Corn Exchange; St. Anne's Church; City Hall; Smithfield Market and the Gaiety Theatre. Within a mile of

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Manchester sent 200 fire fighters to Liverpool to deal with aftermath of the bombing on 20 and 21 December (Hylton, *History*, p. 253).

<sup>18</sup> Leonard Fletcher, *They Never Failed: The Story of the Provincial Press in Wartime* (London: Newspaper Society, 1946), p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now*, 352; Imperial War Museum North, *Manchester Blitz* <<http://www.iwm.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.2790>> [accessed 3 July 2010].

Albert Square, 31.3 acres were in ruins and 165 warehouses, 150 offices, five banks and 200 other business premises were either destroyed or severely damaged.<sup>20</sup>

Salford, a city bordering Manchester, was also very seriously damaged by the pre-Christmas bombing, with 215 killed and 910 wounded, while Stretford, the domestic area closest to the factories and warehouses of Old Trafford and Trafford Park, suffered an estimated 73 deaths.<sup>21</sup> The human cost at Christmas 1940 was also reflected in the homeless: 6,000 people in Manchester; 5,000 in Salford; and 4,000 in Stretford.<sup>22</sup> These figures, confused by the destruction of burial and crematorium records in Barlow Moor Road, south of the city, during the same two nights of bombing, were depressing enough given that they represent nearly one in 60 of every UK civilian killed in the Second World War, but many believed they were an underestimate. Freethy, for example, summed up the confusion over the number of casualties when he stated:

Records show that between the 22 and 25 of December 1,005 people were killed and many more injured. This compares to the 4,100 people who were killed in Liverpool between 1940 and 1941 and the 1,236 poor folk who were killed in Coventry.<sup>23</sup>

None of these figures correlates with statistics supplied by the Imperial War Museum, but there was widespread suspicion in 1940 and 1941 that the published figures did not match the reality. Joyce Kilshaw, of Sale, four miles south west of Manchester, recalled:

One of my vivid memories of the war was looking at the lists, which were pinned up informing the neighbourhood who had been killed in the various air raids. However, I am now sure that these lists didn't give quite a full picture of those who lost their lives and most certainly the numbers had been well and truly censored.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hardy, Cooper and Hochland, *Manchester at War*, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> IWM North, *Manchester Blitz*; Vicki Masterton and Karen Cliff, *Stretford: An Illustrated History* (Derby: Breedon, 2002), p. 156.

<sup>22</sup> Hardy, Cooper and Hochland, *Manchester at War*, p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> Freethy, *Lancashire v Hitler*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Ron Freethy, *Lancashire 1939-1945. The Secret War* (Newbury: Countryside, 2005), p. 14.

She articulated the common fear of people emerging from their shelters not knowing whether their house had survived the air raid intact:

Sometimes news of homes that had been bombed filtered through to the shelter but the ARP wardens were told not to give any information to stop people going out of the shelters whilst the raids were still going on to rescue their belongings. The ARP wardens had to write detailed reports and they were also censored.<sup>25</sup>

The fact that people were concerned about their possessions is indicative of the prevalence, or fear, of looters.<sup>26</sup>

Manchester would endure only one further major raid during the war, in June 1941, leaving it relatively lightly touched compared, for example, to nearby Liverpool which, according to official figures, suffered 2,716 casualties between 1939 and 1945 (and a further 1,173 in neighbouring areas).<sup>27</sup> Liverpool endured 16 heavy raids in 1940 and 1941, and 50 of varying degrees of severity between August and Christmas 1940, including two bombardments that killed 365 people on 20/21 and 21/22 December, the two nights immediately before the Manchester Blitz, yet Home Intelligence inspectors, as this thesis will examine later, observed that morale suffered far more in the latter than it did in Merseyside.<sup>28</sup> There were reasons for this, partly economic. Liverpool boomed during the Second World War, largely because of imports from the United States and Canada which reversed the trend of growth in trade to ports in the south of England, particularly London, during the previous two decades.<sup>29</sup> As in the First World War, trade concentrated on the North Atlantic and by 1947 35 per cent of the city's labour force was employed in shipping and other

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>26</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 324.

<sup>27</sup> E. Chambre Hardman Archive, Liverpool.

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, *Living*, p. 234; Merseyside Maritime Museum, *Spirit of the Blitz* (2003) <<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/exhibitions/blitz/blitz.asp>> [accessed 17 February 2012]; Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>29</sup> *Merseyside: Social And Economic Studies*, ed. by R. Lawton and C. M. Cunningham (Harlow: Longman, 1970), p. 69.



dependent industries.<sup>30</sup> Manchester did not have an equivalent commercial boom to balance the effects of the bombing, but, irrespective of economic factors, Calder stated that often it was those cities and towns that were less used to bombing that suffered most psychologically. ‘The effect on popular attitudes of even a single sharp raid should not be underestimated.’<sup>31</sup>

London, too, had an advantage because of its size. If a grocer’s shop was bombed, another would be within walking distance, so the capital could absorb the strain of continuous bombing. In smaller cities the quality of life could be severely reduced by the loss of utilities and amenities. Also, when the centre of a smaller city was razed, the symbols and buildings of local pride and the centres of local pleasure were destroyed with it. Beaven and Thoms noted that Manchester suffered disproportionately in this respect, stating that Manchester’s Blitz-scale attacks were concentrated on the heart of the city, seriously affecting key institutions such as ‘public houses, cinemas, and public utilities, along with transport systems which linked Manchester’s centre with its suburban areas’.<sup>32</sup>

Calder argued: ‘Small raids were interspersed unpredictably with periods of lull and fierce Blitzes, and no “even tenor” could be established.’<sup>33</sup> After Leicester was bombed relatively lightly for eight hours on 19 November 1940 at a cost of 108 deaths, a special constable wrote: ‘Many fantastic tales swept through the city about the damage, the hundreds, some said, even thousands that had been killed.’<sup>34</sup> That raid brought a residue of fear that lasted for several months. ‘There was nothing but the incessant drone of enemy planes and the constant vigil,’ the same man wrote,

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Calder, *People’s War*, p. 220.

<sup>32</sup> Beaven and Thoms, *Civilian Morale*, p. 199.

<sup>33</sup> Calder, *People’s War*, p. 205.

<sup>34</sup> George Harold Ingles, *When the War Came to Leicester: The Account of the Air Raids on this Great Midland City*, (Leicester: Brooks, 1945), pp. 19-20.

describing the 20-minute spells of severe anxiety as people braced themselves for the noise of bombs exploding. Only when they did not arrive did relief come with: 'Well, they're not coming for us, this time.'<sup>35</sup> Calder stated that it was the lack of regular bombings, the uncertainty, which frayed the nerves:

The worst feature of morale, as the Mass Observers saw it, was the feeling of helplessness which emerged as the weight of remembered and anticipated fear, and of present inconvenience, sank down on the shoulders of populations which did not, like London's, have the stimulus to adaption [sic] provided by nightly raids.<sup>36</sup>

The Manchester Blitz appears to have had an effect out of proportion to its destruction, but perhaps that was because the bombing came as such a shock, both in its occurrence and its timing as the city prepared to enjoy its Christmas break. Freethy stated that while it was relatively easy at the start of the war to censor the armed forces, and even newspapers, it was more of a problem to convince civilians in the north of England that careless talk could cost lives: 'The people of Lancashire needed even more persuading than most because, initially, they felt themselves remote from danger, unlike those in the southern counties.'<sup>37</sup> To many Mancunians the most obvious signs that Britain was at war were minor inconveniences. All Ordnance Survey maps were removed from sale, for fear of being acquired by enemy agents, milestones and sign posts were removed – even the Cross Street building of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News* had all traces of the word 'Manchester' removed from its exterior (below) – and the names of railway stations were painted over so that passengers had to rely on a comprehensive transport knowledge or station staff with loud voices to ensure they left trains at the right

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Calder, *People's War*, pp. 218-19.

<sup>37</sup> Freethy, *Secret War*, p. 9.

place.<sup>38</sup> Even train timetables were pulped to avoid revealing lists of stations in the correct order.<sup>39</sup>

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Donald Read, born in 1930, was a schoolboy in Burnage, a suburb of Manchester three miles from the centre, when the war began and his initial experience was typical of many. He was among 72,000 children from the Manchester area who

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14; National Railway Museum, *The Rail Story of Britain in World War* <<http://nrm.org.uk>> [accessed 10 May 2009].

<sup>39</sup> Freethy, *Secret War*, p.14.

<sup>40</sup> *A Long Exposure: Pictures from 100 Years of Guardian Photography in Manchester 1908-2008*, ed. by Denis Thorpe (Manchester: Axis, 2008).

were evacuated to safer areas, going to Kirkham, in Lancashire, when the war started and then to Bollington, Cheshire, 18 miles south of the city. He was back home by the end of September 1939, however, when the expected bombing did not materialise immediately. Read's recollection of the Manchester Blitz was of a city caught unawares. 'Many voluntary workers in Manchester social services had taken Christmas week off, leaving the city's rest centres and other emergency systems short of staff just when help was most needed.'<sup>41</sup> That, as the thesis will show, added to the confusion and lack of preparedness that afflicted the city in the aftermath of its Blitz.

### 3 The 'Other Fleet Street'

The roots of Manchester's position as Britain's second newspaper print centre began growing from 1821 when the *Manchester Guardian* was published for the first time, to be followed by the *Manchester Courier* four years later.<sup>42</sup> The *Manchester Evening News* and the *Evening Chronicle* were established in 1868 and 1897 respectively and the city started printing a national newspaper on 3 February 1900 when Alfred Harmsworth launched a northern edition of the *Daily Mail* in Gorton, east Manchester.<sup>43</sup> It was a landmark moment because, of the national dailies, only *The Times* and the *Financial Times* declined to follow suit by establishing print centres in the city. Manchester's distribution area embraced England north of Birmingham, Scotland for those newspapers not published in Glasgow or Edinburgh, north Wales and all of Ireland. This provided a market for regional and provincial publications as well as national newspapers and by the start of the Second World War the *Sunday Empire News*, *Daily Dispatch*, the *Chronicle Mid-Day* and the *Sporting*

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<sup>41</sup> Read, *Manchester Boyhood*, p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> Waterhouse, *Other Fleet Street*, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

*Chronicle* were printed exclusively in the city.<sup>44</sup> During the war Manchester was the natural choice as an emergency centre of publication should Fleet Street be put out of action by the *Luftwaffe* and, although this scenario never materialised, transport problems meant many southern editions had to be printed in the city.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.1 *Manchester Guardian*

Despite the *Manchester Guardian* being largely supportive of Germany in the 1920s and a consistent critic of the reparations imposed at Versailles, the Nazis banned it in 1933.<sup>46</sup> It opposed Hitler almost from his emergence in Germany, becoming exceptional in Britain in that it tried to print what it knew about what was happening in the Third Reich. Gannon wrote: 'From the very first there was no doubt but that the *Manchester Guardian* abhorred the Nazi regime, its racial theory and barbarous practices,' which meant the newspaper occasionally found itself in a moral quandary.<sup>47</sup> Following the Nuremberg Nazi Party Conference of 1936, a leading article stated:

After a week of Nuremberg it is difficult for us to remember that we too may be responsible for the present state of Europe. In the violence of Hitler and Goebbels we... do not stop to ask whether any great nation would behave like Germany that had not some cause to do so.<sup>48</sup>

Crozier, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* from 1932 to 1944, insisted it was important to keep the Jewish and other persecutions in the eye of a public, many of whom had anti-Semitic sympathies and who too easily became bored when news was not sensational, and he was particularly scathing about *The Times*, which he felt

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<sup>44</sup> Royal Commission, p. 185.

<sup>45</sup> Waterhouse, *Other Fleet Street*, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 414.

<sup>47</sup> Gannon, *British Press*, p. 76

<sup>48</sup> 'Return to Reason', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 September 1936, p. 8.

ignored or did not pay sufficient attention to these issues.<sup>49</sup> It is interesting that much of Crozier's determination in this regard sprang from the conviction that the *Manchester Guardian* had been negligent in the years before the First World War in exposing the militarist ambitions of influential people in pre-1914 Germany. He wrote to one reporter: 'C. P. S. [C. P. Scott] had such a profound belief in the goodness of human nature... that he would just not believe that there was any important section of opinion in Germany who were a real danger to peace.'<sup>50</sup>

In the countdown to war the *Manchester Guardian* was less culpable than most other national newspapers in playing down the prospect of hostilities. Paradoxically in view of its regional roots, the newspaper provided comprehensive coverage of news directly related to British foreign policy, Germany and Danzig in July and August 1939, averaging 305 centimetres of copy a day compared to *The Times*'s 208 centimetres, the *Daily Express*'s 157 and the *Daily Mail*'s 132.<sup>51</sup> This was partly due to the newspaper's letters pages that, in contrast to the other publications, dealt extensively with Germany and, in particular, the Munich agreement. The tone of the newspaper's coverage was critical of the Nazi regime and there was a negligible amount of the false optimism of the *Daily Express*. A leader printed on 24 July 1939 calling for the inclusion of Churchill and Anthony Eden in the Cabinet was indicative of the sense of foreboding, while a report from Germany read: 'It is possible Herr Hitler will decide in favour of war this year', but said the feeling in Berlin was that he preferred the following spring.<sup>52</sup> It was not a matter of if the war would start, but when.

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<sup>49</sup> Gannon, *British Press*, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Voigt, 25 January 1934.

<sup>51</sup> Guy Hodgson, 'Sir Neville Henderson, Appeasement and the Press' (unpublished postgraduate dissertation, Open University, 2005), p. 64.

<sup>52</sup> 'Herr Hitler's Desire for an "Eastern Munich"', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 July 1939, p. 12.

Even so, the *Manchester Guardian*'s own voice, via its leader articles, was more hopeful, although it described Goebbels as an 'arch illusionist' and his propaganda as 'shriller, wilder and, to put it bluntly, more panic-stricken'.<sup>53</sup> Contrarily, Hitler was described as 'the great man' in another leader on 16 August and even when the Soviet-German pact was announced the newspaper almost mirrored Beaverbrook's optimism when it claimed the crisis was 'extremely threatening, but not beyond remedy'.<sup>54</sup> Reality dawned the following day when the *Guardian* bemoaned the lack of a Franco-British agreement with Stalin: 'The front which was not merely to win a war, but to prevent a war will be much weaker than it might have been, both in a military and moral sense'.<sup>55</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, like other newspapers, had its reason swayed by the evacuation from Dunkirk. Its reporter 'watched with incredulous joy the happening of a miracle', as he saw a destroyer dock with rescued soldiers: 'They at any rate did not regard themselves as the central figures of tragic drama... Their eyes were red with weariness above bags of tired skin, but they were still soldiers and still in good heart.'<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2 *Evening Chronicle*

While the *Manchester Guardian* was undoubtedly earnest in the 1930s, the *Evening Chronicle*, the *Sunday Times*'s theatre critic James Agate argued, had a lighter touch:

The effect of the *Guardian* was to make one feel that the previous day had been one of grave moral questioning and serious responsibility at home and abroad. The *Chronicle* gave one the impression that the day one had just lived through had been

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<sup>53</sup> 'The Gentle Art of Making Enemies', *Manchester Guardian*, 28 July 1939, p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> 'A Time of Waiting', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 August 1939, p. 8; 'Cabinet and Country', *Manchester Guardian*, 22 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> 'The Russo-German Pact', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> 'The Miracle of the BEF's Return', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 June 1940, p. 7.

full of exciting and, on the whole, jolly happenings. One would be serious again in the morning.<sup>57</sup>

Agate, an employee of Kemsley Newspapers, had a vested interest in preferring the *Evening Chronicle*, but its tone was generally lighter and less reverent. Like the *Manchester Evening News*, the *Evening Chronicle* sold at three halfpence (just over 0.5 of a modern penny) a copy and both newspapers printed first editions at 11 am. These were followed by the 'home', 'last', 'last edition extra' and the 'late night final' editions that reached vendors just before 5 pm. The edition was denoted at the top of the title page. Local news came from the paper's reporters and freelance journalists, while Manchester's satellite towns were covered by the Press Association and Extel, the national news agencies, and other national and international news was provided by the British United Press and Reuters. Not that there was much space for these reports because newsprint restrictions meant that by the summer of 1940 the *Evening Chronicle* was down to six pages.

The *Chronicle*'s response to the talks at Munich in 1938 was to describe Chamberlain as 'a spectacular figure' whose virtues shone through a crisis and the paper's regular political commentator, Baxter, praised the Prime Minister for treating Hitler like a 'gentleman'.<sup>58</sup> On 30 September, the day the agreement was announced, the newspaper stated: 'All the world today is hailing Mr Chamberlain as a peacemaker.'<sup>59</sup> The following day it reported: 'The thoughts of British people have turned inevitably to rejoicing and thanksgiving.'<sup>60</sup>

Six months later, after the Germans occupied the whole of Czechoslovakia, Baxter's tone had changed. 'The present occupation of Prague is the greatest offence Herr Hitler has committed against international decency,' his column read, before

<sup>57</sup> James Agate, 'As It Was...', in Bradley, *Fifty Great Years*, p.10.

<sup>58</sup> Beverley Baxter, 'And Now... We Can Look Ahead', *Evening Chronicle*, 29 September 1938, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> 'Manchester May Offer Premier its freedom', *Evening Chronicle*, 30 September 1938, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> 'Millions to Give Peace Thanks Tomorrow', *Evening Chronicle*, 1 October 1938, p. 5.



condemning the invasion of a country ‘which has no more relation to Germany than the moon’.<sup>61</sup> As war loomed, the *Chronicle* assumed a perceptiveness that its previous work could not justify. ‘In the end the world always has a day of reckoning with men like Hitler,’ its leading article read on 1 September 1939. ‘Our hands are clean. We have pursued conciliation to the utmost, but in the last resort we stand ready and united.’<sup>62</sup> On 4 September, the first edition after war was officially declared, an indicator of what was to come in terms of demonizing-the-enemy propaganda appeared. The lead headline read: ‘Liner was torpedoed without warning: 311 Americans aboard’, while the subhead was: ‘Treaty has been callously broken’.<sup>63</sup> There was also an attempt to lift morale with an article on making the most of the blackout. ‘Even though the windows might be darkened at night so that not even a pencil of light shows through on the outside, there is no reason why the inside of a room should be dark and depressing.’<sup>64</sup>

Given the censorship of news of the evacuation of Dunkirk, the *Evening Chronicle* probably did not appreciate the irony in its sub-headline on 27 May 1940 that read ‘Our offensive not yet started’.<sup>65</sup> On 14 June, with the beaten British army back in England, ‘our Special Correspondent’ reported from the South Coast: ‘To a gay eightsome reel, which a man from Motherwell solemnly assured me is called “Hitler’s lament” at home, thousands of British troops left a Southern port for France.’<sup>66</sup> Three days later, with the true position dawning, there was a rush to apportion blame: ‘France has given up the battle’.<sup>67</sup> By the height of the Battle of

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<sup>61</sup> Beverley Baxter, ‘Hitler Again’, *Evening Chronicle*, 16 March 1939, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> ‘The Attack on Poland’, *Evening Chronicle*, 1 September 1939, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Liner was Torpedoed Without Warning: 311 Americans Aboard’, *Evening Chronicle*, 4 September 1939, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Black-out Without Gloom’ *Evening Chronicle*, 4 September 1939, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Allies Move Back from Region of Valenciennes’, *Evening Chronicle*, 27 May 1940, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> ‘New BEF Dance and Sing as They Leave’, *Evening Chronicle*, 14 June 1940, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> ‘French Army Ceases Hostilities’, *Evening Chronicle*, 17 June 1940, p. 1.

Britain, the *Evening Chronicle* had abandoned all pretence at objectivity. 'The RAF is hitting Germany hard – infinitely harder than Goering's *Luftwaffe* has been hitting,' it reported, neglecting the obvious flaw in its argument that the battle was being fought over British territory. It added:

The only thing Hitler can do in the air is to continue on a larger scale the type of bombing we have been getting in recent weeks. The enemy's air force has scarcely hit a military target in Britain but it has managed to do a certain amount of damage to civilian life and property and has also wantonly machine-gunned the streets of open towns.<sup>68</sup>

The alleged futility of the enemy's attacks, along with the attribution of negative characteristics, was emphasised, the words 'wantonly' and 'open' stressing the unashamed attacks on undefended areas. Nine days later the *Chronicle* followed that up with a report of raids at 'three places in North-West England', adding 'one person is said to be slightly injured and the damage was only trivial'.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.3 *Manchester Evening News*

The *Manchester Evening News* became increasingly concerned with politics and foreign affairs under the editorship of Haley, questioning Chamberlain's policies in early 1938. On 16 February its editorial accused the Prime Minister of failing to recognise the singular threat posed by Germany.<sup>70</sup> 'The time has come for the ordinary man to stop avoiding the truth... he knows in reality... where the only danger to the peace in Europe lies.' On 15 March 1938 it called for the inclusion of Churchill in the Cabinet.<sup>71</sup>

While the *Evening News* had stood apart in early 1938, it joined the consensus in the build-up to Munich, praising Chamberlain for his 'courage', although it did

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<sup>68</sup> 'RAF Drive Hitler to Wild Threats', *Evening Chronicle*, 20 July 1940, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> 'Big Air Battle: "20 Raiders Down"', *Evening Chronicle*, 29 July 1940, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> 'After Austria', *Manchester Evening News*, 16 February 1938, p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> 'The Free Peoples', *Manchester Evening News*, 15 March 1938, p. 8.

warn a fortnight later: 'Today the world rejoices. It should not do so without care for the morrow.'<sup>72</sup> The leader added prophetically: 'Hitler's troops will still march... The settlement terms the world is so gratefully applauding today are terrible proof how far aggression has managed to travel along its "peaceful" road.' When the Germans moved on Prague in March 1939 the paper adopted an 'I told you so' stance, stating that the time to act had been six months earlier. It asked if the rest of the world regarded Britain as a nation of clever lawyers who could wriggle out of any agreement and would not stand up to Hitler as long as 'they didn't touch Britain'?<sup>73</sup> A day later it stated: 'The free people of the world await a lead.'<sup>74</sup>

A study of the *Evening News* in the four weeks leading up to the war marks a journey towards unhappy resignation that the conflict was inevitable. On 21 August 1939 the paper commented: 'During the next fortnight the fate of European civilisation may be decided,' while the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact on 23 August led to the question: 'Can any life be worth living in which force and not justice governs the affairs of nations and men?'<sup>75</sup> The same editorial asked: 'Is a man to be conceived as a free, if still imperfect individual... or a mere robot... having no freedom... or rights within himself?' The 1 September edition, two days before war was declared, carried the grim headline 'Warsaw bombed' under which was a report of Germany's invasion of Poland.<sup>76</sup>

The *Evening News*, unlike its rival the *Evening Chronicle*, had a realistic vision of what was going on in France in May 1940, notwithstanding its sub-headlined claim that 'Germans had five casualties to every British'. Its leader noted:

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<sup>72</sup> 'The Wonderful Visit', *Manchester Evening News*, 15 September 1938, p. 6; 'The End of a Nation', *Manchester Evening News*, 30 September 1938, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> 'The Ides of March', *Manchester Evening News*, 15 March 1939, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> 'Without Blinkers', *Manchester Evening News*, 16 March 1939, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> 'The Moving Finger', *Manchester Evening News*, 21 August 1939, p. 6; 'The Choice', *Manchester Evening News*, 25 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> 'Warsaw Bombed', *Manchester Evening News*, 1 September 1939, p. 1.

‘The BEF are getting out. Despite fearful odds, relentlessly beset and harried by a determined and ruthless aggressor, our men are slowly being extricated from a position made desperate by no fault of their own.’<sup>77</sup> During the Battle of Britain the *Evening News* printed tables giving ‘scores’ referring to the number of German planes shot down that week. When Churchill made his ‘finest hour’ speech the newspaper reacted with an editorial: ‘Compare that speech with Hitler’s last effort. In that comparison you will find the inner reasons why this is a war Britain will win.’<sup>78</sup>

#### 4. The Internal Management of Manchester’s Newspapers

Crozier, appointed editor of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1932, was indisputably the man in charge of editorial policy. John Scott, the son of C. P., was the managing director, but believed that a newspaper manager’s duty was to ‘make his paper as profitable as possible, and to refrain from taking part in editorial decisions’.<sup>79</sup> It was not that John Scott lacked interest in what appeared in the newspaper – *The Guardian* Archive has several examples of his non-judgmental comments – but he believed the editor ‘must be as free editorially as if he were the proprietor’.<sup>80</sup> Crozier acted accordingly and memos showed his powers were matched by his attention to detail. He had a penchant for precise English, pronouncing: ‘The best and most effective English for newspaper purposes... simple, direct, lucid, concise, short.’<sup>81</sup> To the reporting staff he wrote in 1940:

The verb ‘to rock’ or ‘to be rocked’ in such phrases as ‘London Rocks’ or ‘Manchester Rocks’ where there is a big explosion is forbidden. The verb ‘to

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<sup>77</sup> ‘BEF heroes pouring home’ *Manchester Evening News*, 31 May 1940, p. 1; ‘Who is for Liberty?’ *Manchester Evening News*, 31 May 1940, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> *Hansard*, HC Debate, 18 June 1940; ‘Britain Speaks’, *Manchester Evening News*, 21 August 1940, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 495.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Guardian* Archive, 3 January 1940.

shock' or 'to be shocked' in phrases like 'Two wardens were shocked when this bomb fell' is also forbidden'.<sup>82</sup>

The production staff were not spared either. A memo to the chief sub editor, F. S.

Attenborough, read:

I reckon that in the last four years I have sent to you personally not less than a hundred notes on 'both... and' and 'either... or' alone (say one per fortnight) and not less than fifty (I think far more) on the misuse of 'otherwise'. And, roughly speaking all wasted. Some people say these things are unimportant... But, unfortunately I can't.<sup>83</sup>

With such scrutiny came conflict and Malcolm Muggeridge, a freelance reporter in the Soviet Union for the *Manchester Guardian* and later an author and broadcaster, wrote to Crozier in 1932 when his copy was toned down: 'From the way you cut my messages... I realise that you don't want to know what is going on in Russia or to let your readers know.'<sup>84</sup>

Crozier was capable of a stinging retort too – in March 1936 he wrote to another reporter: 'Neither I nor my predecessors have been accustomed to be corrected by a member of the staff' – and Muggeridge's short-tempered exchange was not the only one.<sup>85</sup> The outstanding reporter on the *Manchester Guardian* in the build-up to war was Frederick Augustus Voigt, who Gannon described as 'undoubtedly the greatest British political journalist of the 1930s'.<sup>86</sup> It was his exposing of Germany's rearmament that was partly responsible for the *Guardian* being banned in Berlin, but such was his consistent castigation of the Nazis, his writing was frequently toned down, causing rows with his editor. On one occasion in 1933 Voigt wrote to Crozier that his report about 'abductions, torture and secret executions' had been downgraded

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<sup>82</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 497.

<sup>83</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Attenborough 25 January 1937.

<sup>84</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Muggeridge to Crozier, 3 April 1933.

<sup>85</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 513.

<sup>86</sup> Gannon, *British Press*, p. 80.

to rumours that ‘may be “quite untrue”.’ He asked: ‘What is the good of having a man in Berlin if he cannot establish the truth?’<sup>87</sup>

Crozier was a hard taskmaster but a human one, too, and there are several instances of personal feelings being expressed by the editor and his staff. When Alexander Werth’s reports from Berlin put him in physical danger, Crozier withdrew him to Paris writing: ‘I have been uneasy about your safety all the time.’<sup>88</sup> During the war, when he had to intervene on the letters page because of the inexperience of a young journalist, Crozier insisted on calling on a trusted sub-editor, R. G. Garner, who would become night news editor later in 1941. In his diary he commented: ‘Think for the future... send all letters to R. G. – poor R. G.!’<sup>89</sup> Evelyn Montague, who was C. P. Scott’s eldest grandson and the war correspondent for the *Guardian*, wrote on his posting to cover the BEF’s deployment in France: ‘I have never been as nervous since my wedding day as I am at this moment.... But I’ll do my best. It’s a grand chance and I’m deeply grateful.’<sup>90</sup> The following year, Montague reported about the morale in the *Manchester Guardian*’s London office at the height of The Blitz:

Shand and, to a much lesser extent, Ray are rattled. Scott and Miss Isitt are magnificently unmoved. Lambert is not so good; he is defeatist by nature, and was severely affected by the French collapse. I am not quite happy about Werth. Boardman shows no signs of nerves in his conversation, but is notably careful in looking after himself.<sup>91</sup>

He added: ‘Our staff here are exhausted and rattled, and any effort which can be made to spare them will assist the production of a good paper.’ Montague, himself, declared he was: ‘not scared but exhilarated by the bombing’ but fell ill not long afterwards.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Voigt to Crozier 15 March 1933.

<sup>88</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Werth, 20 March 1933.

<sup>89</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier, 11 February 1941.

<sup>90</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Montague to Crozier, 7 October 1939.

<sup>91</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Montague to Crozier, 13 September 1940.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

An indication of the relationship between Crozier and his war correspondent, and the former's authority over editorial matters even when up against relatives of the newspaper's former editor, was also revealed in Crozier's diary: 'E. A. M. [Montague] now writes a letter to me protesting against me spiking his pars. He finds it "mortifying and humiliating" that I should accept agency reports instead of his word.'<sup>93</sup> The following day, Crozier added: 'Letter of apology from E. A. M. for his outburst.'<sup>94</sup>

The strain on the staff was exacerbated by their lack of numbers. Once war was declared, calls to the services and government deprived the *Manchester Guardian* of reporters and editors, including Voigt, who was needed for what Ayerst described as 'political warfare', so former employees returned to bring out the newspaper.<sup>95</sup> Ayerst wrote that the war 'gave old men their chance... or a least their second wind'.<sup>96</sup> Among them was Attenborough, the former chief sub-editor who had turned 70 and returned to work under his previous deputy, while the three principal leader writers in 1939 had a combined age of 175 years, including Crozier who would die, still editor of the paper, on 16 April 1944, aged 64.<sup>97</sup> Haley wrote in tribute: 'Through 12 of the most difficult and troubled years in history, from the rise of Nazism in 1933 to 1944, the eve of its destruction, Crozier put the *Guardian* in the van of the fight.'<sup>98</sup>

What happened at the *Guardian* in terms of staff shortages was replicated across the industry. By the end of 1943, substantially more than a third of the nation's 9,000 journalists had been called up by the armed forces, more were employed by the government and only around 25 per cent of staff photographers remained in Fleet

<sup>93</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier, 10 December 1940.

<sup>94</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier, 11 December 1940.

<sup>95</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 531.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 529.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 530.

<sup>98</sup> Sir William Haley and others, *C. P. Scott 1846-1932: The Making of the Manchester Guardian* (London: Muller, 1946), p. 14.

Street.<sup>99</sup> Reductions extended beyond staffing. Newsprint was rationed and restrictions were put on circulation, so that newspapers could increase sales only by reducing the number of their pages. 'Finance, shortages of raw material, and indeed every factor of production must have been a nightmare,' Lord Burnham, who worked for the *Daily Telegraph* from 1955 to 1986, observed.<sup>100</sup> The Royal Commission on the Press 1947-1949 quantified the lack of newsprint, comparing the 1.25 million tons used before the war to the 350,000 tons in 1948 and, at the rock bottom of February 1943, only 4,320 tons were consumed weekly.<sup>101</sup> Newspapers were reduced by as much as 80 per cent and the Royal Commission noted:

The reduction to four or five pages of newspapers, which before the war averaged over 20, means that much important material cannot be published and that what is published must be highly compressed. Much news must be 'suppressed' for this reason alone and severe compression makes inaccuracy and distortion difficult to avoid. The likelihood that the Press will be subject of complaints is increased.<sup>102</sup>

Space was at a premium, so what was selected for publication became even more significant, not only because trivial reports were rejected but also because stories that were printed had greater impact in a regime of restricted news.

The *Guardian's* pagination came down to 40 per week compared to 120 for March 1938, allowing an increase in production to 58,000 in July 1941 and 60,000 by September of that year.<sup>103</sup> Ayerst wrote: 'There was even a waiting list of about 3,000 would-be purchasers. As many *Guardians* could be sold as could be printed. This was a common experience of all papers.'<sup>104</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* was still a relatively financially poor paper, however, as display advertising migrated to 'popular' papers, and in 1937 it could charge only £1 per column inch compared to

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<sup>99</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 505.

<sup>100</sup> Lord Burnham, *Story of the Daily Telegraph*, p. 181.

<sup>101</sup> Royal Commission, p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 543.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*



*The Times*'s £3 and the *Daily Express*'s £6 10s.<sup>105</sup> Consequently most of its war coverage had to be done through others – the paper paid for the rights to use reports from *The Times*'s correspondents – and only when Montague landed in North Africa with the British First Army and then accompanied the Eighth Army in Sicily and Italy could the service be reciprocated.<sup>106</sup> This arrangement also testified to the lack of competition between the newspapers. The *Guardian* sold only around 3,000 copies in the London area while *The Times* barely penetrated Manchester and the North West. It was there where the *Guardian* mattered:

What the M.G. had to say at this stage about the fighting forces was interesting and important at the time to its readers, but it could not by the nature of things be influential. What it had to say about the home front was both interesting and influential.<sup>107</sup>

The *Manchester Evening News* went into the Second World War under the editorship of Haley, who had joined the newspaper in 1922, became chief sub-editor three years later and was appointed a director of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News* in 1930. A journalist who eschewed reporting because of shyness – ‘that made him an embarrassing casual acquaintance’ – but nevertheless a newspaperman of considerable repute, he would later become Director General of the BBC (1944) and the editor of *The Times* (1952).<sup>108</sup> Haley was a workaholic and an imposing man with a ‘quiet but rasping voice, iron-grey wiry hair, a hard mouth and unsmiling eyes’, while one person meeting him for the first time commented: ‘I’ve met a chap with one glass eye before – but never a chap with two.’<sup>109</sup> Hamilton wrote that Haley came across as cold on first acquaintance: ‘On the surface there was no warmth at all, but underneath, as I came to know, there was tremendous warmth, even

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 490.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 547-48.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 535.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Sir William Haley’, *Times*, 8 September 1987, p. 16.

<sup>109</sup> O. Woods and J. Bishop, *The Story of The Times* (London: Joseph, 1985), p. 331; Denis Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief: Fleet Street Memoirs* (London: Hamilton, 1989), p. 133.

passion.’<sup>110</sup> Appointed editor at the age 29, Haley transformed the newspaper, made it more national in outlook and prepared the ground for the *Evening News*’s supremacy over the *Chronicle*.<sup>111</sup>

Haley became responsible for the day-to-day management of both the *Guardian* and the *Evening News* when war was declared but his grip on the editorial stance of his own newspaper remained. In his interview to be the editor he stated: ‘One man must control news, distribution, advertising, the whole running of the paper.’<sup>112</sup> His appointment coincided with steady circulation growth from around 150,000 in 1930 to more than 200,000 when he left 13 years later and it was thanks to the *Evening News* that the *Manchester Guardian* survived.<sup>113</sup> John Scott recognised this, paying Haley more than he did himself: ‘After all, you make the money we spend.’<sup>114</sup>

Haley, whose judgement in being wary of Hitler’s intentions had been vindicated in the build-up to the war, was less prescient when hostilities began.

Writing in his diary on 3 September 1939, the day war was declared, he noted:

For once it was inevitable. This is said untruly of most wars. It is true this time. So long as Hitler ruled Germany we could not escape ultimate conflict with him because he sought it. The only thing we could do was to see it was at our time rather than at his.

The announcement of the Soviet-German pact spelt the beginning of the end. It may seem foolish to think it will be a short war; I feel it may be. Germany in 1914 was rich and strong after 40 years of peace. We were not one quarter so prepared as we are today.<sup>115</sup>

His short war never materialised and the *Evening News* was soon publishing with fewer reporters and less newsprint, a challenge Haley seemed to relish. When the

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<sup>110</sup> Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, p. 133.

<sup>111</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 491

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p. 490.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 491.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>115</sup> Churchill Archives, Haley, 3 September 1939.

number of his *Manchester Evening News* staff was reduced by three, he wrote in his diary in March 1940:

This is a complete clear-out. And I feel exhilarated rather than depressed. We've done so well lately that we have got into a groove. This will give us all a chance to jump out of it and shake things up.<sup>116</sup>

The pagination was reduced from 16 broadsheet pages to 10, then to eight, and, by July 1940, it had fallen to six. After the print allowance was cut by a further 17 per cent in March 1941, Haley took the decision to make the paper a five-column tabloid, circulating an office memo, 'we are putting on our battle dress', to pacify traditionalists on the paper.<sup>117</sup>

The tone and news judgments at both the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Manchester Evening News* reflected the men in the editor's office, and reporters based in the city were tightly controlled, but much of the copy that appeared in the newspapers came from news agencies. Reuters and the Press Association, the principal providers, were based in one Fleet Street building, so the Ministry of Information could easily control the information flow and ensure that 'the journalism produced could communicate a sense of social unity in the war effort'.<sup>118</sup> Much of this copy came from official communiqués and within a fortnight of war being declared, Crozier was complaining: 'What makes me rather despair is the stuff that they are actually themselves putting out – wordy, woolly and thoroughly commonplace.'<sup>119</sup> The following chapters will include more examples of Crozier's dissatisfaction and he and Haley did not have far to go to complain. John Scott was made a government regional information officer (with the potential consequences for press freedom that suggested), while the chief regional information officer was George Mould, a former

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<sup>116</sup> Churchill Archives, Haley, 25 March 1940.

<sup>117</sup> I. King, 'The Press at War: The Manchester Evening News 1939-1945' (unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Manchester, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>118</sup> Conboy, *Journalism in Britain*, p. 63.

<sup>119</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Voigt, 11 September 1939.

news editor of the *Manchester Evening News* who was given an office in the newspapers' Cross Street offices.<sup>120</sup> This was a convenient accommodation for *Evening News* journalists who could submit their items and have them returned very quickly. 'He had a real sense of a newspaper's urgent requirements,' Bill Pepper, a journalist working on the paper, recalled.<sup>121</sup> The comment sums up the cosy nature of the relationship between Manchester's newspapers and the authorities during the war, a subject that will be looked at in subsequent chapters.

If the editors shaped the editorial stances of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News*, the line of control at the *Evening Chronicle* was more ambiguous. Lord Kemsley was the proprietor, and each of his newspapers carried the slogan 'a Kemsley newspaper' below the masthead, which prompted Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary for much of the war, to describe his publishing empire as 'the gramophone press'.<sup>122</sup> Yet he was 'largely preoccupied with the flagship of the group, the *Sunday Times*', and 'he relied on old-fashioned, able journalists to bring out the papers'.<sup>123</sup> In the case of the *Evening Chronicle* that was James Woodbridge, who had joined the paper in 1912 as a leader writer and who was editor from 1925 to 1943. The *Guardian* described him an editor who 'was able to inspire his staff, whose own views he always treated with courtesy'.<sup>124</sup>

Woodbridge needed his diplomatic skills because Kemsley, like Beaverbrook, generated strong opinions. One contemporary described him as a dim social climber with 'a genius for circulation and advertising', but Kemsley has been credited with creating the platform for the *Sunday Times*'s success in the 1960s, even if it was his brother Lord Camrose who, according to Greenslade, was 'the better journalist and

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<sup>120</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 288.

<sup>121</sup> King, 'Press at War', p. 19.

<sup>122</sup> Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, p. 67.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 55-57

<sup>124</sup> 'Mr James Alfred Woodbridge', *Guardian*, 9 January 1965, p 4.

the better man'.<sup>125</sup> Hamilton, who would edit the *Sunday Times* for Kemsley, was more scathing, describing him as 'a deeply conservative Conservative who had succeeded in life by clinging to his brother's coat-tails and was then saved from real competition... by the war.'<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, reporters on the *Evening Chronicle* would have been answerable to Kemsley who 'reserved to himself final authority in all matters of policy'.<sup>127</sup>

This manifested itself in many ways but the National Union of Journalists, in its submission to the Royal Commission on the Press in 1949, claimed he kept a blacklist. The union described this as: 'lists of persons – and sometimes firms and organisations – mention of whom is completely banned in all circumstances in the columns of the papers concerned', and stated that the Kemsley organisation sent directives on the treatment of weekend speeches sent from London to the provinces during the war: 'Do not use Mr xxxx'.<sup>128</sup> Michael Foot, an MP, future leader of the Labour Party and a former journalist, reported to the Commission:

I think for a period Lord Beaverbrook was on Lord Kemsley's black list; at any rate, it was an extraordinary fact that when Lord Beaverbrook was Minister for Aircraft Production there were no stories about the Ministry of Aircraft Production on Lord Kemsley's front page.<sup>129</sup>

The Royal Commission also heard from the Manchester editor of the *Daily Sketch*, who gave a further example of editorial interference from Kemsley after Hitler had delivered a speech before the Munich agreement. The editor received a call from Kemsley's headquarters in London saying the contents bill should include an 'agreeable' photograph of Hitler with one word: 'Peace'. He added:

The comment of the chief sub-editor was: 'Well that's not my reading of Hitler's speech' and that was the general opinion. But we had to put out the bill just the

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<sup>125</sup> Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, p. 55; Greenslade, *Press Gang*, p.20.

<sup>126</sup> Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, p. 71.

<sup>127</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, cited in Greenslade, *Press Gang*, p. 19.

<sup>128</sup> Royal Commission, p. 123.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p. 124.

same. It was another instance of journalistic knowledge, experience and sense of responsibility to the public being overridden by the fiat of a Press Lord.<sup>130</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter has underlined the importance of Manchester in terms of the British newspaper industry. Other British cities produced regional newspapers but none had the national reach of Manchester's print centres.<sup>131</sup> Robert Waterhouse wrote:

For the best part of the twentieth century Manchester was the other Fleet Street, publishing between a quarter and a third of all newspapers consumed in the British Isles... Manchester was the means by which national newspapers became truly national.<sup>132</sup>

This ensured that the city had the journalists based there, even with reduced resources caused by the war, to report the Manchester Blitz and its aftermath to a national audience. What was printed will be examined in this thesis, but this chapter has shown that an editorial elite, conforming to Herman and Chomsky's top-down news model, influenced the reports in the *Manchester Guardian*, *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle* heavily. In the case of the *Guardian* and the *Evening News* it was their editors, Crozier and Haley, albeit with the sanction of the owners, the Scott Trust, while the *Chronicle* had a less defined management structure. Woodbridge was editor, and his work led to his promotion to become editor of a national Sunday, the *Empire News*, in 1943, but it was the proprietor, Kemsley, who had the ultimate say on editorial policy.<sup>133</sup> The government set the parameters in terms of censorship, but it was Crozier, Haley and Kemsley who decided how far to test these limits.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, Evidence and Papers, cited in Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>131</sup> Appendix 3.

<sup>132</sup> Waterhouse, *Other Fleet Street*, p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> 'Mr James Alfred Woodbridge', *Guardian*, 9 January 1965, p 4.

## Chapter 5

### Censorship

#### 1. Introduction

In terms of censorship, newspapers were made aware of potential government coercion well before the Second World War began. The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act passed on 28 August 1938, Knightley observed, authorised the government to do virtually what it liked to prosecute war without reference to Parliament:

Every press, commercial or private message leaving Britain, whether by mail, cable, wireless or telephone was censored. Everyone, including newspaper editors, was prohibited from ‘obtaining, recording communicating to any other person or publishing information, which might be useful to the enemy’.<sup>1</sup>

The signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939 increased the government’s readiness to control the press and the following day Crozier, the editor in chief of the *Manchester Guardian*, wrote to the London editor Bone about a meeting on censorship with officials who were preparing to establish the Ministry of Information. It will be voluntary, he reported, ‘in the sense that all editors were expected to do as much of the censorship as they could themselves’.<sup>2</sup>

The MOI was formed the day after the outbreak of war and expanded from a staff of 12 to a reputed and numerically resonant 999 within a matter of weeks (in reality it grew steadily to be 1,385 by 31 July 1940 and 3,000 by 1945).<sup>3</sup> Taylor wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Bone, 24 August 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, HC Debate, 11 October 1939, 352, cols 376-484; *Hansard*, HL Debate, 08 August 1940, 117, cols 158-60; Williams, *Murder*, p. 125.

Britain went to war with a wealth of peacetime experience in censorship and with the basis of a censorship machinery that, once its wheels began to turn when the correct lubrication was added by 1941, was to run remarkably smoothly.<sup>4</sup>

Since Britain was fighting for democracy, it was decided that censorship should be conducted on what outwardly appeared to be a liberal basis with editors invited to submit copy they thought might infringe regulations.<sup>5</sup> The censors would then have the right to cut or withhold this material, thus absolving newspapers of any legal responsibility should it later transpire publication aided the enemy. Even if the press ignored the censors' cuts the government still needed to prove that the offending publication had actually aided the enemy before prosecution could take place. It seemed a benign regime; in reality, the censors exercised comprehensive control over what appeared in newspapers. Editors, the chief censor George Thomson noted, were issued with such a barrage of D-notices that the restrictions 'covered nearly every conceivable human activity'.<sup>6</sup>

This was acknowledged even in Parliament where one MP, Sydney Silverman, speaking against the restrictions, said they would put the government 'in a position by no means inferior, as regards the scope of its powers over newspapers, to that occupied by the distinguished Dr Goebbels in Germany'.<sup>7</sup> This system was constructed by Chamberlain and reinforced from May 1940 by Churchill, who forsook his previous occupation as a journalist to bear down on his former Fleet Street employers. Margach noted:

Fleet Street was the foundation of his fortunes and, during his long years in the political wilderness, it sustained him as a national figure. Yet when he became Prime Minister he became authoritarian and repressive, incapable of tolerating any form of criticism in the press. Criticism he viewed as treasonable. He had to be

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor, *British Propaganda*, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> Thomson, *Blue Pencil*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Hansard*, HC Debate, 31 July 1940, 363, cols 1307-49.



restrained by Cabinet colleagues not only from censoring comment but also from suppressing all together newspapers he considered hostile.<sup>8</sup>

According to Margach, Churchill used the ‘majesty of his office to steamroller Fleet Street’ so that coverage of the war became a series of good news stories or columns listing examples of Nazi inhumanity.<sup>9</sup> Its success was down to the expedient of censoring at source – the principal national and international news agencies – so as to avoid the French system whereby information that might be useful to the enemy was blanked out in the newspapers. That French method allowed the public to see the extent of the censorship, whereas British readers could not quantify the work of the MOI.<sup>10</sup> That work ensured that attempts at objectivity became replaced by the reporting of more subjective and ‘biased’ comments via official press releases, government communiqués and, when journalists went out in to bombed-out areas, simple propaganda. As Temple noted: ‘What is remarkable is not that there were clashes – which was inevitable – but that there were so few. Newspapers accepted the need for a propaganda role and there was no real need for over-officious censorship.’<sup>11</sup> As Chapter 1 showed, Fleet Street had not held the government to account in the two years before the war when they had the freedom to do so; once the hostilities began the restrictions on the press were quickly imposed and newspapers had lost the opportunity. Academics, including Curran, Seaton and Kevin Williams, noted that newspapers consciously sought to boost morale at the expense of objective reporting: ‘Most of the British press responded to government overtures, abandoning

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<sup>8</sup> Margach, *Abuse of Power*, p. 64

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Jacquie L’Etang, *Public Relations in Britain: A History of Professional Practice in the Twentieth Century* (Mahwah, NJ: Earlbaum, 2004), p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Temple, *British Press*, p. 48

their role of acting as a watchdog on behalf of the public and adopting a partisan role in favour of government policy.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter examines the relationship between the government and the national and local press in the Second World War, noting it was more complex than mere acquiescence. There were misunderstandings and errors, the government suppressed one newspaper and issued threats to others, and there was a persistent dialogue between the censor and editors. The memos in *The Guardian* Archive are examined to indicate the strictures within which newspaper offices were working and examples of censorship are examined in the three Manchester newspapers during the study period. Finally this chapter looks at self-censorship at the *Manchester Guardian*.

## 2. ‘They could not help the enemy, but are they any use to us?’

Taylor wrote that propaganda and censorship are ‘really different sides of the same medal: the manipulation of opinion’, but despite Britain’s alleged expertise in the former, which will be explored in the next chapter, the war began in terms of censorship with a series of misunderstandings and mishaps that reduced the credibility and threatened the existence of the MOI.<sup>13</sup> Partly this was down to a decision, unknown to editors, by the Allied chiefs of staff to make the war ‘newsless’.<sup>14</sup> Initially British military action was limited mainly to the Royal Navy, who refused to relay information to the press even though the First Lord of the Admiralty was a former journalist, Churchill, and when American newspapers began to be filled with information coming from Berlin, there was an outcry in Britain.<sup>15</sup> This mood was not

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<sup>12</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 62; Williams, *Murder*, p. 119.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *British Propaganda*, p. 153; Williams, *Murder*, p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 238.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 241.

improved when a Commons statement revealed that only 43 of the nearly 1,000 MOI staff had been journalists.<sup>16</sup> Knightley wrote:

The *Daily Express* said that soon Britain would need leaflet raids on itself to tell its own people how the war was going. The *Manchester Guardian* said that the official communiqués could not help the enemy but ‘are they any use to us’?<sup>17</sup>

The situation reached farcical proportions in September 1939 when a total embargo of news of the British Expeditionary Force being sent to France was lifted and re-imposed in a matter of hours so that the police guarded printing presses and newspapers were confiscated from commuters.<sup>18</sup> The blackout was lifted again shortly afterwards. When the British army’s attempt at a second front in Norway in 1940 ended ignominiously but with barely a report in British newspapers, Ed Murrow, of the Columbia Broadcasting System, was scathing.<sup>19</sup> He told his American listeners from London on 22 April 1940: ‘The handling by the press and radio in this country of the news from Norway in the past 10 days has undermined the confidence of a considerable section of the British public in the integrity and accuracy of its news sources.’<sup>20</sup>

What Murrow did not acknowledge, and, as an American broadcast journalist, may not have fully appreciated, was the threat hanging over Fleet Street of a *British Gazette*-style newspaper that could be produced by the government as competition. The *British Gazette* was a short-lived newspaper that had been published by the government during the General Strike 14 years earlier and the fact that Churchill had been the editor of a paper that rose from 200,000 sales to 2 million in eight editions

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<sup>16</sup> *Hansard*, HC Debate, 27 September 1939, 351, cols 1330-4.

<sup>17</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 242.

<sup>18</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind. A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Era*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 248. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the military position was ‘extremely favourable’ the same day Allied forces in Norway were evacuated (‘Allied Progress in Narvik’, *Manchester Guardian*, 10 June 1940, p. 8).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 249.

emphasised the threat.<sup>21</sup> In June 1940 Alfred Duff Cooper, the Minister for Information, met the Editorial Committee, a combination of senior journalists representing the whole of Fleet Street, and was asked if there was foundation in the rumour that a government newspaper would take the place of existing newspapers? ‘Mr Duff Cooper did not give an emphatic denial to the rumour,’ a report of the meeting to the *Guardian*’s editor Crozier read. ‘He said he had heard the matter discussed, but it had not been considered by the Cabinet. He smiled at the suggestion that there might be another “*British Gazette*”.’<sup>22</sup> Six weeks later, with newspapers generally compliant, the government withdrew from its aggressive position when Duff Cooper organised a dinner meeting with journalists (including Michael Foot and future *Daily Mirror* editor Hugh Cudlipp), arranged ‘so that they could talk to him in an atmosphere less formal and less bitter than usually exists’.<sup>23</sup> Montague reported to Crozier that ‘Cooper had mentioned the *British Gazette*, so he says, as a joke, quoting it as an example of which nobody wanted.’<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, a warning had been delivered.

Relations between Fleet Street and the government improved with the appointment of Thomson, first as deputy and then, from 1940, chief censor for the duration of the war.<sup>25</sup> The Rear Admiral felt the press had genuine grievances and adopted the policy to ‘prevent the enemy from gaining military information of value, but also to ensure that the Press and the BBC should have complete freedom to inform the British people and the world at large of every thing that was happening’.<sup>26</sup> The freedom was never as encompassing as Thomson suggested, but the press, after initial

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<sup>21</sup> Price, *Where Power Lies*, p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> *Guardian* Archive, *Wartime Arrangements on the Manchester Guardian*, 1939-42, 21 June 1940.

<sup>23</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Montague to Crozier, 6 August 1940.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 131.

<sup>26</sup> Thomson, *Blue Pencil*, p. 2.

scepticism, eventually came to a working relationship with Thomson and his team at the MOI.

Importantly for this thesis, Thomson acknowledged that air raids presented a problem for those responsible for information and security on both sides. There was the basic question of whether the effects of bombing should be played up or down. If one opted for the former, the chief advantage would be that it would provoke anger and stiffen resistance, but that had to be balanced against the risk of encouraging the enemy and spreading alarm and despondency. Playing down raids, however, would risk belittling the credibility of official communiqués, encourage the spread of rumours and antagonise victims in bombed areas. In May 1941, for example, raids on Glasgow and Liverpool were described as light when casualty figures published a few days later showed this to be false. Thomson reported that this provoked considerable anger:

We had to try and satisfy the natural desire of the inhabitants of a town which had been raided so that their menfolk at the front and their relatives and friends in other parts of the country should know what they were having to endure. They had seen with their own eyes ancient, familiar and homely things turned into heaps of ash and rubble. They knew with what resolution and courage they and the ordinary folk around them had stood up to it and they wanted the whole world to know.<sup>27</sup>

Myths of their own sprang out of the ‘May Blitz’ of 1941 in which Liverpool, in particular, was badly hit, and there were rumours that Merseyside had been cordoned off from the rest of the country.<sup>28</sup> This was untrue, but it highlighted the dilemmas facing the censors. One way out of the difficulty of how much information should be distributed was to allow local newspapers more extensive reports than national newspapers, thus satisfying the victims of raids while restricting the spread of knowledge that might aid the Germans.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Mass Observation, FR 706.

<sup>29</sup> Thomson, *Blue Pencil*, p. 78.

A frequent problem was whether to reveal places that had been hit. The Air Ministry allowed national newspapers to name bombed cities only after it was certain the Germans knew where they had raided, normally meaning a delay of two days, and it was forbidden to identify localities and damage to buildings for 28 days. But, as Thomson pointed out, Goebbels did not wait until aircrew reports had been checked before he put out news of a bombing raid, German radio often proclaiming that London, Liverpool or Manchester had been devastated even before the bombers had returned home:

On the other hand it was most important that the British Press and radio should not give the enemy information of which he was in need. The first essential was to conceal the name of the town raided until the Air Ministry were quite satisfied that the enemy knew it.<sup>30</sup>

The Germans did not always know which cities they were hitting because large conurbations in England were often close together, leading to potential confusion, and the wireless beams used to guide the bombers were jammed by the British. As a consequence national newspapers frequently were forced to be vague. Thomson added:

To enable the press to report some sort of locality, pending release of the name of the town, we divided England into several large areas: North, North East, North West, East, South East etc... Thus the newspapers appearing on the morning following a raid were allowed to publish that a South Western town or a town in South West England had been attacked, but not the name of the town.<sup>31</sup>

Casualties also presented a problem. If the casualty was a doctor, solicitor or shopkeeper, whose name and address appeared in a telephone directory, both the name and the occupation were not permitted in order to prevent the Germans knowing precisely where a bomb had landed.<sup>32</sup> It was a sign of the relative rarity of telephones, and Thomson's preconceptions, that he wrote: 'In the case of a miner, steelworker or

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81-2.

manual worker this difficulty did not of course arise.’<sup>33</sup> Thomson highlighted an example of the minutiae that required the judgement of the chief censor when he had to intervene personally over the *Daily Mail*. The newspaper wished to carry a report of a raid in which it stated: ‘Mrs A., her daughter Annie, aged 14, and her sister, the wife of Lt-Col. A., commanding the seventh Battalion of the X-shires, who had just given birth to a baby, were injured.’ A censor, wishing to remove all reference to the officer, changed it to: ‘Mrs A., her daughter Annie, aged 14, who had just given birth to a baby, were injured.’ The *Daily Mail* challenged the ruling, were told to alter the girl’s age to 19, and a correct version reporting injuries to a woman, her daughter and her sister, who had just given birth to a baby, appeared in print only after Thomson had intervened himself.<sup>34</sup>

Even though there were improved relations brought about by the appointment of Thomson, there were serious clashes between Fleet Street and Downing Street, particularly after Parliament passed new defence regulations in the wake of Dunkirk in which section 2D allowed for the suppression of newspapers and 18B provided for imprisonment without trial. In July 1940 the *Daily Worker* was warned that its pacifist line contravened these regulations and in January the following year the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, ordered Scotland Yard to stop the presses of the newspaper and they were allowed to resume only in August 1942 after Germany invaded Russia.<sup>35</sup>

More significant in terms of size was the relationship between the government and the *Daily Mirror*. Its circulation nearly trebled from 1.36 million in 1939 to 3.7 million in 1947, but it frequently tested the government’s patience.<sup>36</sup> Churchill, who

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.

<sup>35</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Butler and Sloman, *Political Facts*, p. 388; Royal Commission, p. 190.

had used the paper as his platform as a backbencher in 1939, made representations to the *Mirror* to moderate its 'guilty men' attack on Chamberlain in early 1940 and, after he had become Prime Minister, was so angered by the paper in January 1941 that he accused it of:

Creating a spirit of hatred and malice against the government which, after all is not a party government but a national government almost unanimously chosen, which surpasses anything I have ever seen in English journalism. One might have thought that in these hard times some hatred might be kept for the enemy.<sup>37</sup>

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'The price of petrol has been increased by one penny' - Official<sup>38</sup>

Relations soured further in March 1942 when the *Mirror* published a cartoon by Philip Zec that depicted a half-drowned merchant seaman clinging to some wreckage (above). The intention had been to attack any needless waste of petrol, and Home Intelligence stated that was how it was understood by most people, but the

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<sup>37</sup> Hugh Cudlipp, *Publish and be Damned* (London, Dakers), p. 11; Maurice Edelman, *The Mirror: A Political History* (London: Hamilton, 1966), pp. 104-05.

<sup>38</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 5 March 1942, p. 3.



government, or rather Churchill, saw it as an attack and part of a campaign that had begun with an editorial in the *Mirror* the month before.<sup>39</sup> That had read:

The assumption that whatever blunders are committed and whatever faults are plainly visible in organisation, we must still go on applauding men who muddle our lives away, is a travesty of history and a rhetorical defiance of all the bitter lessons of past wars.<sup>40</sup>

The implication of Zec's cartoon, in the minds of Churchill and his Cabinet colleagues, was that sailors in the merchant navy were risking their lives for the benefit of higher profits for private enterprise at the government's connivance and caused unprecedented fury in Downing Street. Churchill, 'famous for his eloquent speeches in defence of liberty', wanted to close the *Mirror*, was reined back by Beaverbrook and Morrison, but nevertheless a full-scale Parliamentary debate followed on 19 March during which a public warning was given that the government would suppress the paper unless it changed its tone.<sup>41</sup> Morrison's public attack on the paper could hardly have been more damning. He said:

The cartoon in question is only one example, but a particularly evil example, of the policy and methods of a newspaper which, intent on exploiting an appetite for sensation and with a reckless indifference to the national interest and to the prejudicial effect on the war effort, has repeatedly published scurrilous misrepresentations, distorted and exaggerated statements and irresponsible generalisations.<sup>42</sup>

In private, Churchill was equally scathing. Crozier, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, revealed a conversation with the Prime Minister on 20 March:

He turned to the *Daily Mirror* question and was very hot and strong about it. He said it was dangerous to have a constant stream of stuff calculated to undermine the morale of the soldier; very serious issues were involved. He resented the 'carping, niggling criticisms' that he and the government received day by day from certain quarters and certain newspapers.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> 'After Singapore', *Daily Mirror*, 16 February 1942, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 58.

<sup>42</sup> *Hansard*, HC Debate, 19 March 1942, 378, cols 1665-9.

<sup>43</sup> Crozier, *Off The Record*, cited in Margach, *Abuse of Power*, p. 83.

And in another conversation recorded by Crozier, Churchill commented: 'The paper I can't stand, the worst of all, is the *Daily Mirror*. Yes, the *Daily Mirror*. It makes me spit.'<sup>44</sup>

Despite Churchill's anger, newspaper proprietors and editors were not as compliant as they had been over the silencing of the *Daily Worker* 14 months earlier and the majority of national daily papers sided with the *Mirror*.<sup>45</sup> Curran and Seaton wrote: 'It thus became clear that closing down the *Daily Mirror* would lead to a major confrontation with a powerful section of the press.'<sup>46</sup> This flexing of Fleet Street's muscles was underlined when another campaign led to the lifting of the ban on the *Daily Worker* in August 1942, but also poses a question: if the press had resisted the pressure of the government, would the censor's grip have been so tight? This is an important indicator that the relationship between Downing Street and the press was more complex than the straightforward pushing of propaganda with proprietors intent on ingratiating themselves with the government. Fleet Street rallied behind the *Mirror* on the grounds of freedom of speech, but later it was apparent that the warning had been grave enough to place all newspapers on their guard for the rest of the war. According to Harrison the threat of 2D hovered over all editors and 'unofficial proposals were mooted for the closing down of all newspapers except *The Times*, the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily Express*'.<sup>47</sup> The *Daily Mirror*, which 'minded its ways without quite mending them', continued to attack examples of inefficiency but not on the scale of March 1942, although it did play a significant role in the defeat of Churchill and the Conservative Party in the General Election of 1945.<sup>48</sup> The effect has divided observers. Williams noted that the government never again attempted to use

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<sup>44</sup> Margach, *Abuse of Power*, p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Harrison, *Poor Men's Guardians*, p. 210.

<sup>48</sup> Koss, *Rise and Fall*, p. 607.

Regulation 2D to suppress publication and Taylor wrote: 'Opinion had not actually been censored or punished, only threatened with it.'<sup>49</sup> Margach was less sanguine:

The crises between the Churchill government and Fleet Street continued over most of the war years, covering many papers... It was a miracle, particularly since newsprint rationing kept papers down to four or six pages, that journalism survived the experience.<sup>50</sup>

### 3. Guidance to Editors: *Manchester Guardian* and the Censor

Price noted that Churchill 'read more newspapers with greater attention than almost any other Prime Minister' so, although the threat of the *British Gazette* was averted, the scrutiny of Fleet Street was constant.<sup>51</sup> The archive of *Manchester Guardian* memos and correspondence has several examples of the generic pressure being applied by the government and, at a more specific level, the censor. In June 1940 a telegram from the Ministry of Information was received in the offices of the *Manchester Guardian*. Under the title 'Guidance to Editors (Not for Publication)', it laid out the government's policy concerning the reporting of war news with a particular reference to air raids:

Germany exercises rigid censorship over news of air raids. Very little information is released for publication and the meagre particulars which appear in the German press are always misleading when compared to authentic reports.

In this country, whilst no one would suggest that the enemy should be given useful information as to the result of his air attacks, it would be contrary to the traditions and spirit of our country that we should adopt such extreme methods as those employed by Germany in keeping facts from its people. We pride ourselves on the fact that 'we can take it'.<sup>52</sup>

The memo went on to say that the *Luftwaffe* was bound to get through, particularly at night and that 'many casualties and severe damage are inevitable'.<sup>53</sup> Then, contradicting the spirit it had initially espoused, the memo issued orders to the press,

<sup>49</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 136; Taylor, *British Propaganda*, p. 164.

<sup>50</sup> Margach, *Abuse of Power*, p. 84.

<sup>51</sup> Price, *Where Power Lies*, p. 115.

<sup>52</sup> *Guardian* Archive, *Wartime Arrangements*, June 1940.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

stating there should be: delays to the full description of air raids; delays to lists and numbers of casualties; and restrictions on the mention of bombed areas ‘even of large towns’.<sup>54</sup>

In the same month, at the meeting with the Editorial Committee that Duff Cooper ‘joked’ about a *British Gazette*, the Minister for Information was also quoted as saying that the voluntary system of censorship had not been satisfactory, and ‘it must now give place to a compulsory system’.<sup>55</sup> Duff Cooper asked the committee to consider three ‘possible solutions’. Namely:

- 1 Complete compulsory censorship using French system (delay of two to three days in publishing news).
- 2 Compulsory source of news so that newspapers could publish from official sources only.
- 3 Board of Censors, consisting of two members from the MOI, Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Ministry of Home Security and the Press. Would meet twice a day and would decide what should be said on certain matters.<sup>56</sup>

These reforms were successfully resisted by the combined force of Fleet Street, but individual editors continued to feel the overt presence of the censor. In June 1940 Crozier warned Bone that complaints had been made ‘from certain quarters (the P. M.) about attacks in the *Manchester Guardian*’ – the brackets were Crozier’s – and five months later Cyril Ray, a war correspondent, reported that three newspapers, the *Melbourne Argus*, *Toronto Star* and *Winnipeg Free Press*, had withdrawn their London correspondents because of the heavy-handed censorship.<sup>57</sup> ‘Representations to the Ministry of Information,’ he wrote, ‘have generally been answered in an offhand way and have resulted in no improvement.’<sup>58</sup>

In December 1940, at a lunch hosted by the Minister for Information, Duff Cooper, and the Home Secretary, Morrison, journalists were told: ‘The censorship as

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Guardian Archive, Wartime Arrangements*, 21 June 1940.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Guardian Archive*, Ray to Crozier, 13 November 1940.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

it affects air raids is to be tightened up... We are telling Germany too much about air raids.'<sup>59</sup> Morrison listed the new restrictions:

1. No mention of water shortages (for fear enemy would return to finish the job in the knowledge there would be little water to put our fires).
2. No criticism of the railway, post office or telephone breakdowns.
3. No mention of people moving out of towns and cities.
4. No mention of fires not being extinguished.
5. Unwise to mention the efficiency in putting out fires.
6. No mention of emergency services moving to help other towns.
7. Don't mention land mines (had a fault and would not explode unless it hit the ground in a certain way).<sup>60</sup>

Morrison finished this lecture by saying: 'If the press is willing to go slow on all this, it is better to do it wholeheartedly. Tell your readers what you are going to do to cheat the enemy and make a patriotic virtue out of necessity.'<sup>61</sup> Within a matter of days Manchester's newspapers were given ample opportunity to practise their 'patriotic virtue' in the aftermath of the Christmas Blitz.

At a more mundane level there was the constant irritant of having to adhere to, and be under the scrutiny of, the censor. Even in 1943, with the war going the Allies' way, Crozier was still being upbraided by a 'very courteous gentleman from the MOI who reads leaders from all over the world each night'. The reprimand read:

The nightly extract from Manchester tends to criticise the government or to tell people not to be too optimistic, or, in short, all is not supremely well in the best of all possible worlds. They have difficulty, they say, in sending extracts abroad and ask for something not so critical.<sup>62</sup>

By then, the dialogue between the MOI and the *Guardian*'s offices was well established. In November 1941 Crozier had written to the MOI complaining of its 'technical ignorance' of the cotton industry:

All references –and there have been many – to labour shortages in the cotton mills have spoken of the shortage in the cardroom, because that is the only department in a mule spinning mill in which women happen to be employed. The deletion of the

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<sup>59</sup> *Guardian* Archive, *Wartime Arrangements*, December 1940.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 February 1943.

word 'cardroom' safeguards nothing from the enemy but merely destroys the point of the sentence.<sup>63</sup>

Three months later he had to defend himself against the censor after the *Guardian* reported there was a shortage of ARP wardens in Salford. Emergency committees, he argued, had to use the press to draw attention to their needs. If the publicity was denied 'the need will not be met and the deficiencies will not be remedied'.<sup>64</sup> In June 1942 Crozier was forced to apologise after the *Manchester Guardian* carried a small story under the headline 'The Two Uncles'. It read: 'In a recent letter received here from a prisoners' camp in Germany this passage had been uncensored: "I hear that Uncle Sam and Uncle Joe are doing well".'<sup>65</sup> The response from the censor was: 'It is thought that any suggestion in our press of laxity on the part of German censorship may result in steps being taken to make it stricter.'<sup>66</sup> The fact that it took the MOI nearly three weeks to respond to the above was indicative of the delays brought by censorial involvement. On 8 December 1942 Crozier complained: 'Montague's message tonight, dated December 5, is useless, being covered by this morning's news, so it goes on the spike... Our service is being almost completely ruined.'<sup>67</sup>

The system for wartime photographs was also complex and slow. To get a permit from the MOI, a photographer had to have accreditation, usually from a newspaper or news agency.<sup>68</sup> Their work had to be given to the censor before it could be distributed, often to a pool for general use, although, to save time, the photographers would self-censor beforehand. Even that was complicated because the

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<sup>63</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to the MOI, 18 November 1941.

<sup>64</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to the MOI, 18 February 1942.

<sup>65</sup> 'The Two Uncles', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1942, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Guardian* Archive, MOI to the *Manchester Guardian*, 10 June 1942.

<sup>67</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Bone, 8 December 1942.

<sup>68</sup> Amy Helen Bell, *London was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz*, (London: Tauris, 2011), p. 29.

public reaction to their presence was not universally welcomed.<sup>69</sup> Inevitably, given the pressures of deadlines, there was friction. On 26 December 1940, two days after the Manchester Blitz, Crozier complained of the problems of getting photographs into the approved pool for publication: 'I want to get them there as soon as possible lest by chance the Censor should release other people's before he releases ours. In which case we shall be undone.'<sup>70</sup> A month later Crozier, normally succinct to the point of brusqueness in his diary, was so irritated about the dithering of the censor about photographs of the Duke of Kent's post-Blitz visit to Manchester that he noted:

Censor stopped Duke of Kent in Manchester at 8 pm. Pictures now in page. Said he did not know what the MOI in Manchester had promised. (2 of them had said the stuff was all right for Thursday's paper). *D Herald* protested because its stuff had gone in early editions. Censor rescinded his prohibition and the stuff went in – we took emergency pictures off machine and restored normal page.<sup>71</sup>

For Crozier's diary this number of words amounted to an essay and was perhaps indicative of his frustration at having to deal with such overt control.

Crozier rarely let this exasperation spill out into his newspaper, but the fall of Tobruk, Libya, in June 1942 was a rare example of the *Manchester Guardian* openly criticising the running of the war.<sup>72</sup> Even then, the criticism was buried below an introduction to the editorial that read: 'The edge has gone off the political threat to the Government in the Commons. The "no confidence" men have shown themselves to be a small muster', but below was forthright condemnation:

We have had our share of disillusionment and disappointment. But the people have been ready to accept and forget. Norway could be forgiven as a scratch affair; Dunkirk followed the defection of our allies... Hong Kong, Singapore and Java were an almost inevitable sequence after our gamble of Eastern unpreparedness had failed. But Libya, as the ordinary man sees it, is another matter. Here at least we were prepared to be strong... The government will have to put itself in the place of the workers who find that after they have worked so hard and so long their

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

<sup>70</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Haley 26 December 1940.

<sup>71</sup> Crozier, 15 January 1941, cited in Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 542.

<sup>72</sup> 'The Discontents', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 June 1942, p. 6.

production is thrown away in the field, battered by superior weight, or left as booty to the enemy.<sup>73</sup>

This was exceptional, and perhaps the *Manchester Guardian* was emboldened because Churchill was being criticised in Parliament, but six days and five editions later it had reverted to type. Its editorial on 3 July read: ‘The government has beaten off the vote of “no confidence” by 475 to 25 votes. We must be all un-feignedly glad at the result.’<sup>74</sup>

#### 4. Fit to Print: Censorship and the Manchester Blitz

Crozier’s reactions to the censor in January 1941 revealed the frustrations felt by editors, who saw their job, after all, as bringing news to the public as quickly as possible. The MOI monitored every report about air raids and the only items of news newspapers could report without submission to the censor were: anti-aircraft guns and British fighters had been in action; bombs had been dropped; enemy aircraft had been brought down; and eye-witness accounts of fights in the air.<sup>75</sup> As has been referred to earlier, the chief censor allowed some leeway for local newspapers and, in the most practical terms, this was demonstrated by the difference between the *Manchester Guardian* that, despite its name, was a national newspaper, and its sister paper, the *Manchester Evening News*, which had only a local audience. The former deliberately kept details of Manchester’s raids to the minimum, while the *Evening News* was allowed more extensive reports than its national partner, thus, in theory, satisfying the victims of raids while restricting the spread of knowledge that might aid the Germans. This section will examine the three newspapers over the related eight-week period to show that news coverage was regularly affected by the need to satisfy the censor.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> ‘The Premier’s Defence’, *Manchester Guardian*, 3 July 1942, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Thomson, *Blue Pencil*, p. 77.



A typical headline appeared on the *Evening Chronicle*'s front page in December 1940: 'Nazis try "sneak raids" on N-West'.<sup>76</sup> The choice of words here is significant and conforms to the propaganda model described by Reisigl and Wodak earlier.<sup>77</sup> The Germans 'try' rather than succeed in their bombing mission, and they were described pejoratively as 'sneak raids' when a similar mission by the RAF would have provoked adjectives such as 'daring' or 'secret'. Propaganda will be examined more thoroughly in the next chapter, but the work of the censor is apparent too. The N-West was used when the place under fire was Manchester, the standard practice for all initial reports of raids, and the placing and prominence of the report was also indicative. Typically, it would require a very strong news story to supplant a bombing as the lead story, but the first raid on the city was a single column under the shoulder of the second lead in columns six and seven of an eight-column page. The apparent downplaying of this story by a Manchester paper was deliberate in that to have led the front page with it would have been an indication that the main destruction was in the city. The report, too, contained typical phrases that diminished the effect of the raid and disguised the geography, beginning: 'A short but concentrated attack was made on a district of an inland town... Damage was not heavy, although there were a number of casualties, some fatal.'<sup>78</sup> Normal news-writing conventions would dictate that the deaths would have been in the first sentence.

This was typical of the censorship throughout the study period and showed that newspapers' willingness to suppress reports of casualties and bomb damage was as keen in the immediate build-up to Manchester's Blitz as it was in the seven weeks afterwards. If there was an exception it was in the immediate aftermath of 22 and 23

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<sup>76</sup> 'Nazis Try "Sneak Raids" on N-West', *Evening Chronicle*, 17 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse*, p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> 'Nazis Try "Sneak Raids" on N-West', *Evening Chronicle*, 17 December 1940, p. 1.

December 1940 when Manchester's local newspapers were allowed to refer to the city as the *Luftwaffe's* target. As Mancunians could see the bombed-out buildings in the city centre, Salford and Old Trafford with their own eyes, and German radio was announcing that Manchester had been Blitzed, the need for secrecy became redundant. Only the timing of the details were influenced and it was 3 January 1941, 10 days after the first heavy raid, that the *Manchester Guardian* announced that the Free Trade Hall, the Royal Exchange, Chetham's Hospital and Manchester Cathedral had suffered substantial damage.<sup>79</sup> These details had appeared a day earlier in the *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle*, which may have been a nod to the freer licence given to local newspapers, and the *Evening News* acknowledged the censor's role with the headline: 'First proper report on damage to Manchester', which neither explained why it had taken 10 days, nor how the previous reports had been less than proper.<sup>80</sup> Under a sub-headline 'Free Trade Hall in ruins: Royal 'change [sic] roofless', the report read:

Manchester today revealed to the world how the Germans attack 'military objectives'. Historic buildings dating back more than 500 years and known the world over now bear the scar of the Hun, wantonly damaged in recent pitiless raids. They have been named for the first time.<sup>81</sup>

The expression 'the scar of the Hun' was deeply subjective, and conformed to Reisigl and Wodak's theory of attributing negative characteristics on the enemy, but just in case the reader was left in doubt about the crimes against the city's heritage, the *Evening News* emphasised the cultural loss to the city. The Royal Exchange was described as 'one of the largest of its kind in the world'; the Free Trade Hall as the 'home of many great Hallé concerts'; and Chetham's Hospital and Manchester

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<sup>79</sup> 'Raid Damage in Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 3 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> 'First proper report on damage to Manchester', *Manchester Evening News*, 2 January 1941, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

Cathedral were listed as ‘two architectural gems’. The censor ensured not a single mention was made of the considerable damage to the city’s industrial infrastructure

The government’s restrictions on casualty figures meant that no Manchester newspaper issued the true numbers of the dead, although they did acknowledge the numbers were high. Gardiner wrote:

The War Cabinet had taken the decision that it would be ill-advised to make casualty figures public, but once the Blitz started it became clear that rumours often exaggerated the number of deaths and serious injuries, so stark notices were posted outside town halls giving the number of those killed and injured, but without identifying the location of the ‘incidents’ and insisting that the information ‘must not be published in the press’, lest it prove helpful to the Germans by informing them how successful their raids had been.<sup>82</sup>

The *Manchester Evening News* printed a report a week after the Christmas Blitz in which it was stated:

Although no official figure can be obtained of the total number of deaths caused during recent air raids in the Manchester area, it is estimated that nearly 500 men, women and children were killed. In addition, there were many injured.<sup>83</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* followed that up the next day, although the censor’s hand can clearly be detected:

In view of the rumours which have circulated both within and outside the city, it is important to point out a ‘*Manchester Guardian*’ representative was informed by a member of the City Council yesterday, that the position on December 27 was that the fatality list was substantially less than 500.<sup>84</sup>

The newspaper was careful to attribute the figure to the council official but its dissembling was to no avail because, as the previous and following chapters show, the public, distrusting what they read in their newspapers, believed that the figures were being kept deliberately low. They believed this with some grounds given that the

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<sup>82</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 37.

<sup>83</sup> ‘500 Killed in Manchester Blitz’, *Manchester Evening News*, 30 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Manchester Air-Raid Deaths’, *Manchester Guardian*, 31 December 1940, p. 5.

figures for the dead and wounded were later estimated at 972 and nearly 4,000 respectively.<sup>85</sup>

The Births, Marriages and Deaths section did not bring clarity. Eight of the death notices in the *Manchester Guardian* on 27 December did not give a date, but stated typically: 'In December, by enemy action', thus still apparently trying to keep German intelligence wondering whether the *Luftwaffe*'s radio beams led its bombers to the right destination. The work of the censor is apparent because the lack of detail in terms of dates is in contrast to other material that was printed: the home addresses were Whalley Range, Heaton Norris, Stretford, Knutsford and Hulme; the Hulme victim was a Catholic priest; two victims were a married couple.<sup>86</sup>

The mass funerals for the dead at the city's Southern Cemetery were covered, although the number of victims was kept deliberately vague. Surprisingly, the report was not the lead story in the *Evening Chronicle* on 28 December 1940 – that was reserved for an attack by RAF torpedo planes – which was an idiosyncratic choice for a Manchester local newspaper, and, instead of specifics, the *Chronicle* concentrated on the mood.<sup>87</sup> The introduction read: 'They died together; they are buried together. Rich man, poor man, the aged and the children, the victims of the Manchester Blitz were buried today. And over them the Last Post was sounded.'<sup>88</sup> The language, harking back to the trenches, emphasised the egalitarianism of the dead, but, like the casualties of the First World War, there was a lack of detail in terms of numbers. The report, too, did not linger over the deceased and, instead, there was a urgency to emphasise a community on the road to recovery. A sub-head lower down the report announced: 'City returning to normal', while the sentence that followed was:

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<sup>85</sup> IWM North, *Manchester Blitz*.

<sup>86</sup> 'Births, Marriages, and Deaths', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> 'RAF Torpedo Planes in North Sea Raid', *Evening Chronicle*, 28 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> 'Last Post Sounds Over Manchester Dead', *Evening Chronicle*, 28 December 1940, p. 1.

‘Throughout the raided areas of Manchester there were sure signs today of the great works that have been accomplished in bringing a return to smooth running.’<sup>89</sup> The later chapter on other, contemporary reports on Manchester will show this was not the case even a week later.<sup>90</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, of 30 December, was more forthcoming in stating that ‘seventy-two people were buried in the civic service’ but by then, with funeral services occurring on a daily basis, the numbers had become so confused as to be meaningless.<sup>91</sup> The details were more illuminating when it came to the fire service and on 1 January 1941 the *Guardian* reported that 17 fire fighters had died ‘in the raid’.<sup>92</sup>

Manchester was bombed again on the night of 9/10 January 1941 and there was a sense of growing confidence in the evening papers’ dealings with the censor, conforming to the guidelines but using German reports to identify the city. The *Manchester Evening News* did not reveal the target was Manchester in its second lead on page one, reporting: ‘Scattered attacks with high-explosive and incendiary bombs were made on a North-West inland town last night, but although many incendiaries were dropped, only a few fires were started.’<sup>93</sup> Immediately below it, however, was the headline ‘Would you believe it?’ that prefaced the report: ‘Manchester bore the weight of last night’s German air attack, and was heavily hit, the Berlin radio said today.’<sup>94</sup> On the same day the *Evening Chronicle* was even bolder, proclaiming: ‘The fire bomb fighters – men and women organized among themselves to protect their homes against fire in air attack – went into action during the night and thwarted an

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Raid Victims: Manchester Funeral Services’, *Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1940, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Manchester’s Fire-Fighters’, *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1941, p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Nazis scatter explosives and incendiaries in NW’, *Manchester Evening News*, 10 January 1941, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Would You Believe It?’, *Manchester Evening News*, 10 January 1941, p. 1.

attempted Blitz on a wide scale by the Nazi raiders.<sup>95</sup> The report went on to list damage to houses, shops and a cinema, all civilian targets, but while there was not even a reference to a North-West town, the ‘you’ in the headline made it obvious where the incendiaries had fallen. A cut out in the report stated: ‘Strong formations of the German air force directed their attacks last night against important military objectives in Manchester,’ says the official German News Agency.<sup>96</sup>

The Home Intelligence report on the city, referred to earlier, highlighted several shortcomings in Manchester’s preparation for its Blitz and its reaction afterwards, yet, in accordance with Lang and Lang’s assertion about the importance of what is omitted in news reports, obvious stories for a local newspaper were virtually ignored. On Saturday 4 January an *Evening Chronicle* headline read ‘Criticisms answered by city transport chief’, but, while this was the first hint of public dismay at the city’s response, the report was unquestioning.<sup>97</sup> Instead it merely reported the official’s response to a letter to a newspaper that claimed there were insufficient buses, traffic chaos, and inflexibility over routes so that buses stuck to old routes even though they were bombed out and impassable. An uncensored report would have led on the alleged the deficiencies.

Four days later two headlines on one report also suggested that the city had made mistakes. ‘Lessons of the Manchester Blitz’ the main headline announced, with the sub-head reading: ‘Grim, heroic page in city history’.<sup>98</sup> Instead of listing the lessons, however, the story quoted Manchester’s Lord Mayor saying: ‘Never in their history have the citizens shown greater courage or determination.’ The only whiff of criticism was a mention of the need for more firewatchers and more rest centres

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<sup>95</sup> ‘You beat the fire-raisers’, *Evening Chronicle*, 10 January 1941, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Manchester Say Nazis’, *Evening Chronicle*, 10 January 1941, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Criticisms answered by city transport chief’, *Evening Chronicle*, 4 January 1941, p. 4.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Lessons of the Manchester Blitz’, *Evening Chronicle*, 8 January 1941, p. 1.

within reasonable reach of the congested areas 'where heavy casualties were likely to occur'. Both were couched in terms of praise for the people who had been on duty.

The words 'pride', 'thankfulness' and 'gratitude' were used liberally.

The *Manchester Guardian* was equally circumspect in its criticism, its reports often failing to deliver what was promised in the headline. So a report with the subsidiary headline 'Neglect of Precautions in Manchester' ignored several obvious news stories. Its second paragraph listed recommendations in a report, reading:

These included firewatchers thoroughly trained in fire fighting on duty during raids... It was also suggested that employees should be given elementary instruction in the use of fire appliances, that water tanks should be installed to supplement mains supplies, that special risks should be notified to the local fire authorities, that hydrant points should be clearly shown, and the advisability of having a direct telephone line to the nearest fire station should be considered.<sup>99</sup>

There were several elements of news in that list that would have merited a better introduction than the one it got: 'The *Manchester Guardian* understands that a full report on all fires caused in Manchester during last week's raid is being prepared for the Emergency Committee.'<sup>100</sup> This was bland stuff that hardly encouraged the reader to go on, and the criticism was instead lower in the report and attributed to another newspaper. *The Observer* was quoted by the *Guardian*: 'It is admitted that much of the damage caused by fire in the raid on Manchester would have been averted by proper precautions.'

Both the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Observer* listed one raid on Manchester when there were two, but while the censor's blue pencil may have influenced what could be printed, the restrictions on information even affected what could be said. On 28 December it was reported that a Lieutenant Thomas Lonsdale Hilton, of the Royal Naval Voluntary Reserve, had been found guilty of expressing

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<sup>99</sup> 'Fire-Watchers', *Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1940, p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

defeatist views by a Naval Disciplinary Court. According to the prosecution, Hilton had asked where the Royal Navy had been when Germany had crossed 120 miles of water to invade Norway? 'Our shipping losses were greater than our building strength,' Hilton was reported as saying, 'and if England was building more aircraft then Germany must be building thousands.'<sup>101</sup> His punishment, the *Guardian* noted, was a severe reprimanded.

One censorial restriction was the reporting of the weather. There were fears that trains and other vital transport would become easy targets for the bombers if they were halted in drifts so the weather was a banned topic, which posed many problems for editors, particularly as in the first winter of the war was the coldest for 45 years.<sup>102</sup> A front page headline in the *Manchester Evening News* on 29 January 1940 read: 'Road and Rail chaos in Britain's severest hold-up', above an article which reported that certain of Manchester's satellite towns had been cut off without post or papers, and how people had been stranded and unable to report for work, without any mention of snow and ice.<sup>103</sup> The only quoted reference in the report referred to concerns for children, who were suffering in the cold, although the newspaper did carry the headline 'Cheshire is stagnant' on the back page.<sup>104</sup> The following day the *Evening News* found the means of overcoming the ban by printing a photograph of children playing in the snow in Piccadilly with the caption 'taken during the cold spell, which began last month'.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> 'Defeatist Talk in Bus', *Manchester Guardian*, 28 December 1940, p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> Freethy, *Secret War*, p. 21; Weatherworld  
<http://www.ukweatherworld.co.uk/forum/index.php?/topic/49321-the-severe-winter-of-1939-40-a-special-report/> [accessed 1 April 2013].

<sup>103</sup> 'Road and Rail Chaos in Britain's Severest Hold-up', *Manchester Evening News*, 29 January 1940, p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> 'Cheshire is Stagnant', *Manchester Evening News*, 29 January 1940, p. 6.

<sup>105</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, 30 January 1940, p. 1.



The strict censorship of newspapers ensured that the grimmer tales of 1940 and 1941 did not reach the wider audience that they would in peacetime, although Freethy related an example of how that censorship had a twin edge. Butterfly bombs were attractive-looking weapons that descended almost like landing helicopters on to Lancashire and other parts of Britain. Some were caught in trees and many curious youngsters were killed or maimed as they tried to take a closer look, casualties whose fate was hidden among the statistics of those killed in conventional bombing.<sup>106</sup> As Freethy noted: 'This successfully led the Germans to think that the weapons were an expensive failure and they stopped dropping their deadly butterflies.'<sup>107</sup>

A strict blackout of secrecy was also imposed over the V1 attack on the North West of England, and the Manchester area in particular, on the morning of Christmas Eve 1944. According to German records, 40 to 50 missiles were launched from *Heinkel He111* bombers over Hull and an area immediately west of the Pennines received the brunt of them. Casualties, the numbers all censored, were inflicted on Stockport, Oldham, Worsley and Tottington near Bury. At Tottington six people were killed, Chapel Street was demolished, and a memorial garden now occupies the site.<sup>108</sup> Other V1s landed on Radcliffe, Hyde and Didsbury, the last of which released propaganda leaflets before exploding. These included quotations from letters said to be from British prisoners of war saying that life in Germany was better than that in Britain under Churchill.<sup>109</sup> These events were not reported.

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<sup>106</sup> Freethy, *Secret War*, p. 20.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

## 5. Self Censorship at the *Manchester Guardian*

Fleet Street operated from 1939 to 1945 with the censor watching keenly, but editors and reporters, while aware of this disapproving eye, also seemed willing to go beyond even the strictures set by the Ministry of Information. The restrictions imposed on newspaper reporters, whether through official pressure or through editorial and personal conviction, were articulated by Montague in a memo to his editor Crozier on 13 September 1940, a year into the war and at the height of the London Blitz. The memo gave an insight into the self-censoring mind-set of the reporter in that it was entitled: 'Picture of what is happening here in London and cannot be published'. He wrote:

The fundamental fact here is that the East End is scared out of its wits, and is eager to accept any kind of settlement which would put a stop to the bombing. Doctors who have been working in rest centres say that the East Enders recover in an incredibly short space of time when once evacuated. I can confirm from my own experience. My wife lost her nerve a few days ago when a bomb burst 20 yards from our house; when I told her to clear out, she recovered her nerve entirely a quarter of an hour later, merely through the knowledge that she was going to be out of it before long.<sup>110</sup>

The suggestion that Londoners had been bombed to the point where they would have been keen to talk peace terms with Hitler fundamentally contradicts the myth of the Blitz. No-one reported it then, and it is at odds with today's popular conception of fortitude under fire that was summed up by Marr who stated: 'The Blitz was a devastating attack from the air that everyone had dreaded, yet it didn't break the spirit of the people or dim their humour.'<sup>111</sup> Montague suggested that the real picture was that humour was difficult to locate in a large part of the capital 'scared out of its wits'.

Montague's memo urged Crozier to use the *Manchester Guardian* to campaign for the evacuation of the East End 'within the limits allowed by the

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<sup>110</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Montague to Crozier, 13 September 1940.

<sup>111</sup> *Andrew Marr's The Making of Modern Britain*, episode 6, dir. by Roger Parsons (BBC2, broadcast on 4 December 2009).

censorship', describing the bombing as worse than anything he had endured with the British Expeditionary in France.<sup>112</sup> He added:

For the East End it is particularly hard to bear. Those living near the big fires are in the position of soldiers lying out in no man's land with flares all around them; their position is known and they can only lie there and wait to be bombed.<sup>113</sup>

This First World War imagery emphasised Montague's fear that the war effort 'may be torpedoed' unless the East End was quickly evacuated.<sup>114</sup> Giving an insight into the prevailing inclination towards self-censorship in Fleet Street, he added:

Pictorial descriptions of the raids and their results are more or less limited nowadays by the censorship to word-pictures of bombs falling and buildings in ruins, and I propose, again with your approval, to ease on these, which are monotonous and depressing.<sup>115</sup>

This was a *Guardian* reporter exercising self-censorship although there is evidence in *The Guardian* Archive that Crozier, too, was wary of printing newsworthy items for fear of the reaction of the authorities. In a memo to Bone, the editor gave his reasons why he refused to print a report in June 1940 of plans to unite Britain and France into one country in an attempt to prevent the surrender of French forces.<sup>116</sup> By any standard, that was a hugely significant news story, historically, socially and militarily, yet Crozier, along with every other Fleet Street editor, chose to ignore or downplay it.<sup>117</sup> 'I should not use the story... about Sunday's proceedings. I think it would sound too irresponsible for so tremendous an act of State,' he wrote.<sup>118</sup>

Nearly a year later, when Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy, inexplicably parachuted into Scotland in an attempt to meet the Duke of Hamilton and negotiate a

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<sup>112</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Montague to Crozier, 13 September 1940.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Bone, 18 June 1940.

<sup>117</sup> *The Times* of 18 June 1940 put the report halfway down page 6, albeit its main news page, but it amounted to a single-column story 20 centimetres long.

<sup>118</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Bone, 18 June 1940.

peace with Britain, Churchill insisted: 'We must not make a hero of him'.<sup>119</sup> Hess was placed in the Tower of London, Churchill insisted he should be 'strictly isolated' and editors were urged to:

1. Emphasise his [Hess's] importance and popularity in Germany.
2. Write up his past.
3. Speculate on correspondents' own authority as to the reasons for the flight.
4. Write up the achievements of the flight, which may in itself be regarded as evidence of his complete sanity.<sup>120</sup>

The instructions were also explicit about what could not be reported, including any conversations or messages which Hess may have and any mention of the Duke of Hamilton.<sup>121</sup> In response, Charles Lambert, the *Guardian's* diplomatic correspondent who had been based in Berlin before the war, wrote to Crozier: 'From what I hear about Hess I should think he is insane, or at least that his mind is unbalanced.'<sup>122</sup> No indication of Lambert's opinion, nor any questioning of Hess's mission – something that had the potential to fracture the Soviet-German Pact – appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*.

If these were glaring omissions, there was a greater one in June 1941 when Crozier took the decision to ignore reports of what was a pivotal moment of the Second World War, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. In a 'confidential report' that was unattributed but probably stemmed from Montague, it was stated:

Germany sees she has got to nullify the ultimate Russian menace now because the war is going to be a long one. No confirmation of any clash yet but present tension cannot go on... His object therefore is to kill the Russian bogey now and thus improve his war position against us.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Cited in Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 354.

<sup>120</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, III, *The Grand Alliance* (London: Cassell, 1952), p. 55; *Guardian* Archive, 13 May 1941.

<sup>121</sup> *Guardian* Archive, 13 May 1941.

<sup>122</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Lambert to Crozier, 14 May 1941.

<sup>123</sup> *Guardian* Archive, 19 June 1941.

The report, which continued ‘Germany’s main bombing strength believed to be held in readiness for Russia’, was dated 19 June 1941 and, as Germany and the Soviet Union were allied at the time, there is no obvious reason why Crozier chose not to run a story that under any circumstances meets the criteria as newsworthy.<sup>124</sup> Operation Barbarossa began on 22 June.

This reluctance to tackle larger news events is extraordinary in terms of normal news values in a newspaper, and emphasises that the *Manchester Guardian* was subject to self-censorship, although this was not unique in the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, it mirrored the British press’s attitude to another landmark event, the Abdication Crisis in 1936, when Fleet Street chose to ignore Edward VIII’s relationship with Wallis Simpson even though newspapers throughout the world were reporting it. As a consequence, it came as a greater shock when the British public were finally informed, it inflamed the constitutional crisis, and undermined public trust in the press (Mass Observation was formed partly because the newspaper coverage of the public’s reaction was considered inadequate).<sup>125</sup> Crozier made reference to this in a letter in August 1940, to a reader, J. W. Dulanty, who had asked whether newspaper accounts that the UK was considering invading Éire to pre-empt similar plans by Germany had been ‘inspired’ and encouraged by the government. The question itself indicated a mood of scepticism and Crozier’s reply, while defending the reputation of Fleet Street, did nothing to dispel the notion that the British press lacked boldness:

You will remember that for some time before the Abdication Crisis the newspapers maintained complete silence although they knew what was afoot. It was afterwards suggested by many people in this country, and it was widely believed in the United States, that the newspapers had agreed among themselves to keep silent and that they had been ‘inspired’ to do this by the government. This was, in fact, a complete

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Charles Madge and Tom Harrison, *Britain by Mass-Observation* (London: Penguin, 1939), p. 23.

misconception, for we acted independently, each of us hoping it would be unnecessary to wash the dirty linen in public and each, I may add, wondering whether some rival contemporary might not one fine day, decide to ‘blow the gaff’. But there was no agreement and no ‘inspiration’.<sup>126</sup>

While the Abdication Crisis fell before the war, Crozier’s response, written in August 1940, betrayed an attitude of self-imposed compliance that was relevant in respect of the reporting of the Blitz. It did not meet the self-proclaimed fiction of neutral news values, and nor did it follow the assertion of one of Crozier’s predecessors as editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, C. P. Scott, who had asserted that the journalist’s primary function was the gathering of news.

## 6. Conclusion

The context in which newspapers of 1939 to 1945 operated can be illustrated by an incident when a woman from Éire sent her daughter in England some eggs. The daughter responded with a letter of thanks and included the joke: ‘I wish you could send me a cow!’ The letter she received from one of the 10,000 civil servants monitoring letters and telegrams in Britain read: ‘Import of cattle into England from Éire by private individuals is not permitted. This letter, therefore, which asks for a prohibited article, is returned to sender.’<sup>127</sup> With this kind of scrutiny, the circumspection of newspaper proprietors and editors is put in a different light and it should also be remembered that Prime Minister Churchill was more willing to use the stick than the carrot when it came to the press. Hylton noted:

Despite his own background as a journalist, Churchill treated the press with a similar contempt to that shown by Neville Chamberlain. He was one of the leading protagonists for tighter control of the media and even objected to factual reports of speeches by MPs critical of the government – the Ministry would censor the offending passages.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> *Guardian* Archive, 2 August 1940.

<sup>127</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 151.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

Yet this chapter has shown that Manchester's newspapers were compliant when it came to censorship and even went beyond the government's strictures. Crozier's disinclination to publish stories in the *Manchester Guardian* that would be newsworthy in any circumstance, such as Germany's plan to invade the Soviet Union, suggested that newspapers (and no other reported the story either) were so willing to subscribe to the master narrative that they went even beyond what was prescribed by the censor. The *Manchester Evening News*, the sister paper of the *Guardian*, and the *Evening Chronicle* showed similar enthusiasm to downplay or gloss over bad news and exaggerate the good, yet, as later chapters will show, this did not lead to reassurance and optimism in the Manchester public, but rather to scepticism and distrust of the press.

Bingham wrote: 'While texts usually contain a "preferred" meaning, this meaning can always be negotiated, resisted, or ignored by the reader', and Manchester's public had reason to be sceptical.<sup>129</sup> If their newspapers were to be believed, the *Luftwaffe* damaged hospitals, schools, shops and houses while the city's industrial infrastructure remained untouched. Yet the RAF's bombsights were so honed that their precision bombing wiped out arms factories, transport links and power utilities at no loss to civilian life. The Manchester public could see that factories were in ruins, that they could not get public transport to work even if their workplace was undamaged, that hundreds of their fellow citizens were homeless and housed in under-resourced and overcrowded shelters and, as the next chapter will show, that they could not even drink water without boiling it first.<sup>130</sup> The consequence was widespread cynicism. Hylton wrote:

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<sup>129</sup> Bingham, *Gender*, p. 11.

<sup>130</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

Along with direct censorship, journalistic euphemisms for war-time reverses became commonplace. A rout became a 'retrograde movement', a 'disengagement' or simply 'straightening the line'. Insanity caused by exposure to the fighting became 'battle fatigue' or 'exhaustion'.<sup>131</sup>

He noted that other examples included the initial blaming of damage caused by V2 rockets on gas explosions, leading to their being christened them 'flying gas mains'.<sup>132</sup> Even the armed forces became euphemistic and bomber crews participating in raids that spectacularly failed to find their targets spoke of major assaults 'on German agriculture'.<sup>133</sup> The MOI, which could have made reporting any news a near-impossible process for journalists, did not approach the extent of its potential draconian powers and became known, according to Koss, as 'Minnie', 'a fusspot dreaded not so much for what she did as what she might do.'<sup>134</sup> Price stated:

The press, by promising to be on its best behaviour, had seen off the danger of direct government control... The mainstream media had fought an effective rearguard action to protect their liberties. It was a campaign based more on self-interest than high principle and didn't extend to protecting those people who wished to use the right to free expression to propound more extreme views.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 137

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Koss, *Rise and Fall*, p. 604.

<sup>135</sup> Price, *Where Power Lies*, pp. 117-18.



## Chapter 6

### Propaganda and the Management of Opinion

#### 1. Introduction

The Second World War, according to Taylor, witnessed the biggest propaganda battle in the history of warfare. For six years, he claimed, all the participants ‘employed propaganda on a scale that dwarfed all other conflicts’.<sup>1</sup> In terms of propaganda, Britain’s preparations were advanced by 1939. Twelve years earlier Lasswell had written: ‘There is no question but that government management of opinion is an inescapable corollary of large-scale modern war’ and in 1936 the Committee of Imperial Defence formed a sub-committee to prepare plans for a Ministry of Information on the outbreak of war.<sup>2</sup>

The British government drew on its experience derived from the First World War, which was, according to Carruthers, the first ‘in which propaganda was a vital, and thoroughly organised instrument’ and, to Ferguson, ‘the first media war’.<sup>3</sup> The vital importance of propaganda was recognised on both sides of the Western Front from 1914 to 1918 and, confronted by casualties on an industrial scale, Britain embarked on an intensive campaign of information suppression and manipulation. The author John Buchan commented in 1917: ‘So far as Britain is concerned, the war could not have been fought for one month without its newspapers.’<sup>4</sup>

The propaganda effort in Britain between 1914 and 1918 focussed on the demonization of the enemy, – the German soldier was depicted as a murderer who

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, *Munitions*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Carruthers, *Media at War*, p. 29; Ferguson, *Pity*, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Hubert Gebele, *Die Probleme von Krieg und Frieden in Grossbritannien Wahrend Des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Bern, Switzerland: Lang, 1987), p. 45, cited in Ferguson, *Pity*, p. 213.

committed ‘all sorts of atrocities’ – censorship and news management.<sup>5</sup> Alice Goldfarb Marquis wrote that this model of censorship was achieved by the close control of news from the trenches by the military authorities combined with news management provided by a ‘tight-knit group of “press lords” who (over lunch or dinner with Lloyd George) decided what was “good for the country to know”.’<sup>6</sup> As a consequence newspapers frequently failed to mention losses or battles, including the sinking of the battleship *Audacious* in 1914, and the Battle of Jutland occurred in a news vacuum because, as Lord Balfour told George Riddell, ‘it would have occasioned un-necessary anxiety’.<sup>7</sup> Why were journalists so willing to suppress important news? Goldfarb Marquis wrote:

The obvious answer is that they all belonged to the same club, whose membership also included the most powerful politicians. Publishing a casualty list... would have meant expulsion from the club; social ostracism apparently meant more to the newsmen than their professional duty to inform the public.<sup>8</sup>

Knightley wrote that Britain had created a propaganda organisation by the end of the First World War that became the model on which Goebbels based that of the Germans 20 years later and certainly Hitler wrote admiringly in *Mein Kampf* of Northcliffe’s work as director of external propaganda, describing it as ‘an inspired work of genius’. He added: ‘I myself learned enormously from this enemy propaganda.’<sup>9</sup> This became part of the myth propagated by the Nazis that the German army had not been defeated but had been betrayed by Jews and financiers in 1918. Eugen Hadamovsky, a Nazi propagandist, wrote in *Propaganda and National Power* in 1933: ‘The German people were not beaten on the battlefield, but were defeated in

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<sup>5</sup> Eberhard Demm, ‘Propaganda and Caricature in the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28, 1 (1993), 163-192 (p. 181).

<sup>6</sup> Alice Goldfarb Marquis, ‘War as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13, 3 (1978), 467-98 (p. 476).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 477-78.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 478.

<sup>9</sup> A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 213, cited in Ferguson, *Pity*, p. 161.

the war of words.’<sup>10</sup> Erich Ludendorff, commander of the German army in 1918, wrote: ‘Words today are battles. The right words, battles won; the wrong words, battles lost.’<sup>11</sup>

Britain’s propaganda in the first two years of the Second World War had external and internal targets. The former was aimed at enemy countries and the United States, whom Churchill hoped to persuade into the conflict, but there were imperatives at home too.<sup>12</sup> There was pessimism in government circles about Britain’s willingness to fight borne by a cynicism in working class circles caused by the slaughter in the First World War and the ‘false promises’ made to returning soldiers about ‘homes fit for heroes’.<sup>13</sup> The 1930s had also seen the rise of the pacifism movement and the widening of social divisions brought on by unemployment. These discordant voices will be returned to in a later chapter, but Williams wrote: ‘On the outbreak of war in 1939, those in authority believed that the experience of the 1930s had made the British worker so militant that he wouldn’t fight and that class divisions would weaken morale.’<sup>14</sup>

The MOI’s earliest attempts at propaganda were based on building resolve and were rooted in traditional themes, national feelings, of King, country and ‘our past’.<sup>15</sup> The ministry’s initial shortcomings were epitomised by one poster (below). This, in many minds, underlined the class divisions in Britain and even the newspaper most associated with the establishment, *The Times*, described the poster as ‘insipid and

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<sup>10</sup> Cited in Ferguson, *Pity*, p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> Goldfarb Marquis, ‘Words as Weapons’, p. 468.

<sup>12</sup> In terms of the United States, the results were mixed. There was a major congressional investigation begun in 1940 into the levels of pro-British propaganda being published through Hollywood until Pearl Harbor brought it to an end. Cited in Nicholas Pronay and Jeremy Croft, ‘British Film Censorship and Propaganda Policy in the Second World War’, in *British Cinema History*, ed. by James Curran and Vincent Porter (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 144-163 (p. 155).

<sup>13</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*, p. 77; Williams, *Murder*, p. 125.

patronising'.<sup>16</sup> Williams noted: 'Official propaganda at the start of the war was inept, lacking knowledge of public opinion and betrayed a complete distrust of the people. It was in Lord Reith's words, "utterly ineffective".'<sup>17</sup>

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Williams's comments referred to the MOI but overlooked the ministry's more persuasive work with the press because newspapers delivered government-derived propaganda to people's homes from September 1939. Curran and Seaton wrote: 'The press, including critical and independent-minded papers such as the *Daily Mirror*, consciously sought to bolster public morale at the expense of objective reporting. Coercive censorship was made, to some extent, unnecessary by self-censorship.'<sup>19</sup> Lord Reith, Minister for Information from January to May 1940, said famously 'News is the shock troops of propaganda' and this chapter will look at how the words used by the 'other Fleet Street' were mobilised before and after the Manchester Blitz of

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<sup>16</sup> McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 126.

<sup>18</sup> Jackie L'Etang, 'State Propaganda and Bureaucratic Intelligence: The Creation of Public Relations in 20th Century Britain', *Public Relations Review*, 24, 4 (1998), 413-441 (p. 430).

<sup>19</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 63.

1940.<sup>20</sup> The first section will analyse the week preceding 23 December 1940 to set the coverage of the Blitz in context. The second will look at the editions of 23 and 24 December in detail because they were printed while Manchester was under attack and news was readily available on the newspapers' doorsteps. Finally, the third section will look at the post-Blitz newspapers for seven weeks during which Manchester's press had time to reflect and to investigate any shortcomings exposed by the extremes of war. This approach will allow the thesis to reflect on whether there was a consistent approach to propaganda or whether the newspapers reacted differently when their readers became the news story.

## **2. Before the Manchester Blitz**

### **2.1 *Manchester Guardian***

Bernays described propaganda as an 'unseen mechanism', and part of the mastery of manipulation of opinions is to deny or minimise propaganda's existence.<sup>21</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* provided an example on 16 December 1940 when it carried a report on a radio broadcast to the United States by the novelist and playwright J. B. Priestley, in which he stated that Britain's government did not take propaganda seriously. 'Instead of doing too much propaganda we did not do half enough,' he was paraphrased as saying.<sup>22</sup> This was the *Guardian's* interpretation of Priestley's broadcast because, when he was quoted directly lower in the report, the tone was different:

He complained that the people of Britain were left too much in the dark, 'not so much because somebody wants to deceive it [sic] and hide the truth as that there are too many censors who are afraid of making a mistake and at the same time have no particular enthusiasm for keeping the public informed'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pronay, 'The News Media at War', p. 178.

<sup>21</sup> Bernays, *Propaganda*, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> 'Mr. Priestley on Our Censorship', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

A study of the *Manchester Guardian* in the week before the city was attacked suggests that the newspaper's enthusiasm for keeping its readers informed was tempered by other considerations. The night after reports of Priestley's broadcast appeared, Manchester suffered a bombing raid and the *Guardian's* news story complied with the polarized propaganda technique framed by Nohrstedt *et al* discussed earlier in the thesis. It was not the lead story on its main news page, which was an unusual display of news judgement even allowing for the obligations placed on a newspaper that purported to be national. Instead, the bombing of the city was confined to a single-column story in column three and its introduction read: 'High-explosive and incendiary bombs were dropped in a North-West inland area last night during a raid which lasted for about an hour. Heavy bursts of AA fire were directed against the bombers.'<sup>24</sup> Although Manchester was not named, the level of detail in the ensuing paragraphs, in the circumstances of a raid taking place as page deadlines were coming and going, suggested the Manchester-based paper had its own reporters very close to the scene. This would have told any serious analyst that the city had been hit. In keeping with accepted news values outlined by Richardson, the second sentence of the above ought to have focused on the extent of the damage so the prominence given to the work of the ack-ack gunners seemed an intentional attempt to boost morale. The damage and loss of life (vaguely worded) came immediately after the tribute to the ack-ack. 'One district of a North-West inland town suffered considerable damage and there were a number of casualties, some of which were fatal.'<sup>25</sup>

The report, in line with Reisigl and Wodak's theory of linguistic assignation, was keen to underline German bad points and Allied good. To emphasise the German

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<sup>24</sup> 'Night Raid on the North-West', *Manchester Guardian*, 17 December 1940, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

‘crimes’, the list of damage mentioned civilian targets – houses, business premises, a chemist’s shop, buses, a public house, two churches, the rectory of one of them, some lock-up shops, a cinema, two pubs, a girls’ hostel, a savings bank, and a children’s playing field.<sup>26</sup> The only ‘military’ target mentioned was an A.R.P. post, but, from a propaganda point of view, the public at the time would have seen it in the same category as the others – it was the local centre to which one’s civilian husband or father went after putting on his dark navy uniform and steel helmet with the ‘W’ for warden.<sup>27</sup> The minor nature of some of the damage to the more emotive targets did not deter the reporter from using it. ‘Slight damage was done to a stained-glass window of a church’ and splinters struck the outside of another church.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, a double-column report next to the Manchester bombing story (columns four and five) quoted communiqués from the RAF and HQ Cairo. They were quoted verbatim, along with a report under the byline of the Air Ministry News Service and listed targets of RAF raids on Naples and various towns in Germany. These were warships, an aerodrome, railway stations, junctions and goods yards, factories, merchant vessels, munitions factories, power stations, grain elevators and oil plants.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.2 *Manchester Evening News*

Propaganda had a role to play in shaping the attitudes of the British and a report on shelter etiquette in the *Manchester Evening News* on 17 December 1940 conformed to Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell’s model in that it attempted to ‘direct behaviour’.<sup>30</sup> Under the headline ‘Shelters not for lazy mothers’, the report

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Peter Stansky, *The First Day of the Blitz* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 78.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Night Raid on the North-West’, *Manchester Guardian*, 17 December 1940, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Jowett and O’Donnell, *Propaganda*, p. 289.

read: 'The practice of leaving children unattended in shelters must stop.'<sup>31</sup> Using Richardson's list of questions, the articles probably stemmed from an official source (although that was not acknowledged) and, while it is debatable how much power and social influence the newspaper would have on the missing mothers, it could have strengthened the resolve of its readers to enforce good practice. That was on page three, while the bombing raid on Manchester the previous night was on the front page, although, like the *Guardian* and the *Evening Chronicle*, it was not the lead but the third most prominent story. Surprisingly given that it was its readers that came under attack, the newspaper attempted to shape behaviour again. Under the headline 'Foolish crowds risk bomb death', the report read: 'Hundreds of sightseers ignored all appeals to keep roads and pavements clear, risked death and impeded the work of wardens and ambulance men after a working class district of a North-Western town had been raided last night.'<sup>32</sup> On the back page, there was a portentous piece of reporting given that five days later Manchester was about to be attacked. On 17 December Mancunians could read:

Rest centre accommodation for Manchester people, who might be bombed out of their homes, has been speeded up in the last few days so that there are now in the city 21 permanent fully-equipped centres to house 8,000 people. And, within the next few days the *Manchester Evening News* learned today, there will be many more.<sup>33</sup>

The intention of the propaganda was to reassure, but, as Manchester would discover within a week, the city was not prepared. The reassurance was hollow.

This was the only instance of the *Evening News* tempting providence. After Coventry was bombed in November 1940, the newspaper's London editor Malcolm Gunn wrote a comment piece in his column 'In Fleet Street today', asking why some

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<sup>31</sup> 'Shelters Not for Lazy Mothers', *Manchester Evening News*, 17 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> 'Foolish Crowds Risk Bomb Death', *Manchester Evening News*, 17 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> '8,000 Homeless can be Housed in Manchester', *Manchester Evening News*, 17 December 1940, p. 6.



towns like Coventry were named but others, like Manchester and Birmingham, were not. His conclusion was that it was down to the Air Ministry – a strange assertion when he knew full well it was down to the MOI – and civic pride:

‘Brum’ has less of a grievance than that mysterious ‘North West town’ which up to now has suffered complete anonymity and can’t get any publicity at all. One’s heart bleeds for this brave little known and essentially modest people, who up to now, have not even been officially credited with a Molotov breadbasket.<sup>34</sup>

It was a light-hearted, facile, comment that created an ‘us’ and ‘them’ confrontation even if the ‘them’ on this occasion were fellow-Britons in bombed cities. The intention, presumably, was to demand attention for Mancunians who had survived attacks by the *Luftwaffe* and it backfired three weeks later when the city received publicity by being bombed to an extent that morale plummeted.

### 2.3 *Evening Chronicle*

It was not difficult to locate the *Evening Chronicle*’s attempt to polarize opinion. On the top of every edition, just below the paper’s main title, was the message ‘Hitler’s War – xxth Day’, the number rising every 24 hours. The count began on 3 September 1939 when it was Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, who had declared war. The intention to place blame – linguistically to apportion characteristics in Reisigl and Wodak’s terms – was evident in the frequent use of the word ‘Nazi’ which appeared three times on the front page of the *Evening Chronicle*’s 17 December 1940 edition. This had a value in typographical terms in that the word was short and would fit in headlines but it also branded all Germans as Nazis. The semiotics of the most prominent, headlined ‘Nazis try “sneak raids” on N-West’, were referred to earlier in the thesis but the report also provided a contrast to a story on the same page about the RAF’s attacks on the Italian port of Bari and the German city of

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<sup>34</sup> ‘N-West Town’, *Manchester Evening News*, 29 November 1940, p. 2

Mannheim.<sup>35</sup> London sources were quoted as describing the raid on Mannheim as a 'heavy attack'. The story told of how 'many important targets were left in flames', contrasting with the churches attacked by the *Luftwaffe* in the former report. The report of the raid on Manchester had two cross-heads – lay-out devices to break up type but used to emphasise aspects of a story that the sub-editor considers important – to set an upbeat tone: 'Fires soon out' and 'Warden hero'.<sup>36</sup> The report read: 'Incendiaries were dropped on a number of other North-West inland districts, but where fires were started they were quickly put out by the ARP services.' The warden story began: 'Hero of the attack on one North-West town was a 34-year-old warden, John Molloy, father of two children, who gave his life while sticking to his post.' There was a description of how Molloy, who was in charge of a public shelter, remained in the doorway while bombs were 'whistling down', and tried to persuade people still outside to take cover. One of the bombs injured him, and he died in hospital.<sup>37</sup> The image of the hero is carefully drawn and conforms to a mythology that Jowett and O'Donnell describe as being embodied 'in recurrent symbols and events', and the futility of the enemy's work was underlined by the report of the damage that focused on a block of property already scheduled for demolition.<sup>38</sup> A more artful use of propaganda was the reference to the 'heavy anti-aircraft barrage' that was going on at the time.<sup>39</sup>

The target audience would have had every right to question some of the reports and the comment in their newspapers that were anxiously looking for optimistic news to print. On 19 December 1940 a report from Istanbul quoted a Turk who was not named and who, allegedly, had returned from a visit to Britain. It read:

<sup>35</sup> 'Mannheim and Bari Bombed', *Evening Chronicle*, 17 December 1940, p. 1

<sup>36</sup> 'Nazis try "Sneak Raids" on N-West', *Evening Chronicle*, 17 December 1940.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda*, p. 292.

<sup>39</sup> 'Nazis try "Sneak Raids" on N-West', *Evening Chronicle*, 17 December 1940.

‘The morale has not been in any way affected... What the German bombs will never be able to destroy is such a nation’s underlying morale and resistance and determination to fight on.’<sup>40</sup> In the same newspaper Baxter wrote of ‘Hitler’s setbacks’, adding: ‘He can truly say that his victories have outpaced those of Napoleon himself and no conqueror has ever accomplished so much in so short a time.’ Two sentences further on he added without irony: ‘Diplomatically Hitler has suffered a heavy defeat’.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. The Blitz editions

#### 3.1 *Manchester Guardian*

The raid of 16 December 1940 proved to be a trial run for both the *Luftwaffe* and Manchester’s newspapers because the propaganda techniques were repeated six days later on the first night of the Christmas Blitz. The final edition of the *Manchester Guardian* on Monday 23 December comprised four pages, 86 per cent of the editorial (non-advertising) space of which was devoted to war related items. The bombing of Manchester was not the lead, but a single-column running down the middle of page three, the main news page. This may have indicated the pressures on deadlines – the Blitz began at 7.45 the previous evening and printing was disrupted by 11 incendiary bombs falling on the *Guardian* roof in that night – but more probably there was a concern that leading with it would tell the *Luftwaffe* that its pilots had successfully targeted the city.<sup>42</sup> The four decks of the headline were:

NIGHT RAID ON NORTH-WEST

Heavy Attack on Inland Town

MANY FIRE-BOMBS

<sup>40</sup> ‘A Turk Tells of British Morale’, *Evening Chronicle*, 19 December 1940, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Beverley Baxter, ‘Hitler’s New Year Plans’, *Evening Chronicle*, 19 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, p. 541.

## People Trapped in Shelter Rescued

while the introduction read:

The German Air Force, continuing its campaign of heavy night bombing, concentrated its attack last night on an inland town in North-West England. Hundreds of incendiary bombs and many high-explosives were dropped and some fires were started in different parts of the town, but the entire staffs of the fire brigades were quickly called out and fought the outbreaks. The firemen worked through the barrage and amid falling bombs.<sup>43</sup>

Manchester was not mentioned by name, although the *Guardian*'s sister paper the *Manchester Evening News*, published later the same day, felt free to identify the city.

In terms of propaganda, four points were made: the town concerned did not take the bombing passively; the highest possible number of firemen fought the outbreaks; there was no delay in calling them out; and they worked courageously under enemy attack. In reality, there was a shortage of civilian defence staff, who had been moved to Liverpool the night before, and the fire service, as later editions will show, were hindered by a shortage of fire watchers and had considerable problems putting out the fires.<sup>44</sup> The effect of the bombing was also minimised with a good news element on the bottom deck of the headlines; civilians had been trapped but had been rescued.<sup>45</sup>

Subsequent paragraphs continued to stress the plus points in line with the propaganda theory that if a message is 'consistent and repetitious' people are unlikely to challenge it.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the enemy aircraft 'were met by sharp bursts of fire from ground defences'; in a number of cases civilians used sandbags to extinguish the incendiary bomb fires; nurses helped to put out fires when a hospital was hit; and when people were trapped in the wreckage of a public house, rescue squads 'worked strenuously to rescue them'. The *Guardian* staff themselves played their part, but, although reference was made to bombs landing on a newspaper office, censorship as

<sup>43</sup> 'Night Raid on North-West', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Hylton, *History*, p. 253.

<sup>45</sup> 'Night Raid on North-West', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda*, p. 302.

well as modesty forced them to withhold which was involved: 'A newspaper office was hit by incendiaries, but the office fire-fighters put out the flames before any damage was done.' Nowhere were there pictures or reports of the damage done or the casualties inflicted, an absence that could be explained by the extraordinary circumstances in which the newspaper was printed, but the publications that followed on 24 and 27 December proved there would have been no desire to print them even if the journalists and the production team had the time and information.

That was propaganda by omission, conforming to Lang and Lang's assertion that what is left out of a news report is often as important as what is included; a study of the language elsewhere on page three exposes propaganda by inclusion.<sup>47</sup> A cross-head proclaimed: 'Three hospitals hit', while the *Luftwaffe*'s targets were identified as houses, schools, shops, business premises, public buildings and hospitals, all non-combatant constructions. Unity was stressed in a report about the homeless who found shelter with friends or at public rest centres staffed by the Women's Voluntary Service. The desired effect on the target audience would have been to cause outrage, and attribute bad actions to 'them', that sick and innocent patients had been targeted, while comfort that care was being provided for those who had suffered in the bombing ('us').

The *Manchester Guardian* of 24 December was also produced while the city was under attack but also had the benefit of a day in which to report what had happened on the night of 22/23 December. Yet the most revealing information did not come in the news reports, but in the advertisements, nearly all small, that filled the front page. Two prominent display adverts said more about the true state of the city, the first, signed by the Town Clerk, reading: 'All water for drinking purposes should,

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<sup>47</sup> Lang and Lang, 'Personal Influence', p. 171.

until further notice, be boiled before use.’<sup>48</sup> There was also a display advertisement of the same size opposite consisting of a Christmas message from the Minister of Transport, urging people not to travel over Christmas.<sup>49</sup> The message was of a city’s basic functions close to collapse, but no news reports tackled this. Page two was nearly all commercial and financial news, sports results and radio listings, but there was still an element of censorship. A brief statement that daily services at Manchester Cathedral had been suspended for the present failed to give the reason: the cathedral had been bombed.<sup>50</sup>

The facing page was extraordinary in that, with a city still smouldering, its transport infrastructure creaking and Mancunians needing to boil water to drink, more than half was devoted to photographs stressing defiance: Whitley bombers under construction at a northern factory (probably at English Electric, in Preston); a Whitley in flight; anti-aircraft ammunition production for the Fleet; Australian troops in the Western Desert; and a Cecil Beaton photograph of Churchill looking ready for a fight. To emphasise German ‘crimes’, a bombed House of Commons completed the set. The lower half of the page was almost entirely on subjects other than the war, although there was an underlying theme of how to behave. ‘Lucio’, in the ‘Miscellany Column’, recalled being in the British Museum, close to a ‘100-per-cent-safe air-raid shelter’, when an attendant informed the researchers that aircraft were overhead. ‘Not one of ’em budged or indeed took the slightest notice,’ he reported with obvious approval. The use of the abbreviation for ‘them’ has a (perhaps ironical) *Boy’s Own Paper* ring.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> ‘Manchester Cathedral’, *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Miscellany’, *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1940, p. 3.

The main news page focussed on the previous night's (23/24 December) attacks. The lead headline read:

# NIGHT RAIDERS AGAIN IN THE NORTH-WEST

## Heavy Attack on an Inland Town

### HOSPITALS, PUBLIC BUILDING, AND A CINEMA HIT <sup>52</sup>

The city was disguised in the introduction as 'a North-West town', although the sub-editor responsible for the headline had decided it was safe to go beyond the text and call it an 'inland' town'. This was perhaps done to make it clear that it was not another attack on Liverpool, which was still burning from the raid by 294 bombers on the Saturday night. The propaganda was most obvious in the third deck of the headline that emphasised the civilian status of the damage, while the report read: 'High explosive bombs caused damage to house property, public buildings, and hospitals and a cinema were hit in one district.'<sup>53</sup> It added: 'The raiders had to run the gauntlet of fire from the ground defences.'<sup>54</sup> This 'running the gauntlet' metaphor exaggerated the effectiveness of the gun batteries as Erich Sommer, a German airman, stated: 'We laughed off the enemy defences... The flak didn't worry us as it was mostly badly directed.'<sup>55</sup> Shrapnel from British anti-aircraft shells killed more people on the ground than it killed German aircrew, but the noise of the guns was, nevertheless, good for civilian morale.<sup>56</sup> One enemy bomber shot down was therefore a good-news story, and the flak may have scored at least one hit: a sentence was included, attributed to the Press Association, stating that a raider was reported as shot down at Old Trafford, Manchester.

<sup>52</sup> 'Night Raiders Again in the North-West', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1940, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> J. Richard Smith and Eddie J. Creek, *Kampfflieger*, II (Hersham: Allan, 2004), p. 102.

<sup>56</sup> Gaskin, *Blitz*, pp.186-87.

The raid on the first night of the Blitz was demonized as part of a ‘Nazi attack on the civilians of Britain’, as if this were its sole purpose. ‘Wave upon wave of bombers, drawn like iron filings to a magnet, swept over the burning buildings’ and dropped high explosives among the fire fighters. Many families were ‘made homeless’, and ‘innumerable decent homes’ were ‘broken and laid down by the enemy’.<sup>57</sup> The language was designed to underline it was ‘us’ under attack – ‘families’, ‘decent’, and ‘homes’, while ‘laid down’ was resonant of a deceased relative – and the indictments were emphasised by a cross-head: ‘Schools suffer’. As in previous pages, there was an attempt to minimise the Germans’ success. The report stated that many hours of intense bombing produced ‘a surprisingly small number of casualties’. The information was attributed to the town clerk, but a truer picture emerged in the first paper after Christmas, on 27 December, when it reported that ‘a mass funeral of the victims of the raid in Manchester will take place at Southern Cemetery tomorrow’.<sup>58</sup>

The propaganda message of ‘we can take it’, reinforcing ‘the cultural myths and stereotypes’, ensured the mood of the 24 December paper was resolutely upbeat.<sup>59</sup> The public transport vehicles were said to be undamaged, apart from a few broken windows; two schools had been taken over to supplement the rest centres; and ‘One group of firemen could talk of nothing but the courage of three girls who stayed in town all night making cups of tea and carrying them round to the bomb teams.’<sup>60</sup> But a reporter stated plainly: ‘It was a bad night.’ He asserted, however, that although civilian damage was great, the people were ‘still, in Mr Churchill’s phrase, “grim and

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<sup>57</sup> ‘Sunday Night’s Bombardment of Manchester’, *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1940, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> ‘A Mass Funeral’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Jowett and O’Donnell, *Propaganda*, p. 289

<sup>60</sup> ‘Sunday Night’s Bombardment of Manchester’, *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1940, p. 5.



gay”.’<sup>61</sup> As a subsequent chapter will show, Home Intelligence reported to the government that some people in Manchester were close to despair.

### 3.2 *Manchester Evening News*

There was no attempt by the four-page, three-halfpence, *Manchester Evening News* of 23 December 1940 to disguise where the bombs had fallen the previous night. Page one, which was the main news page, led with a report on the raid, its introduction stating: ‘Manchester had its longest and most severe aerial bombardment last night’.<sup>62</sup> The propaganda impact lay in the second deck of the lead headline that referred to ‘Two raiders believed down in North-West’. To put that into context, that represented a success rate of little more than 0.7 per cent given that 270 aircraft took part, but it was not an isolated piece of morale boosting. Under the left-hand ‘shoulder’ of the main head there was a bold headline across three columns asserting: ‘Chins up in the North-West’, while under the right-hand shoulder was the headline: ‘Mannheim again left in flames’ – another ‘hitting back’ piece.<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere on the page there were examples of attempts to shape values, attitudes and behaviour. Role models were provided in the shape of nurses who stayed at their posts despite a hospital being bombed, while the antithesis was provided by a report headlined ‘Soldiers accused of looting’.<sup>64</sup>

While the 23 December *Manchester Evening News* openly identified Manchester as the targeted city, there was more reticence in the last extra edition the

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> ‘Manchester Blitz: Many Buildings Fired’, *Manchester Evening News*, 23 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Chins Up in the North-West’ and ‘Mannheim Again Left in Flames’, *Manchester Evening News*, 23 December 1940, p. 1; Had the facts about Mannheim been known at the time, they would not have helped much in the propaganda war. The first big attack on Mannheim on 16 December was a trial run for area bombing, but aerial photographs obtained on 21 December had shown the operation ‘failed in its primary object’. [John Terraine, *The Right of the Line: The Royal Air Force in the European War 1939-1945* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1997), p. 269].

<sup>64</sup> ‘Soldiers Accused of Looting’, *Manchester Evening News*, 23 December 1940, p. 1.

following day. Page one's lead headline read: 'Buildings dynamited in Lancashire town'.<sup>65</sup> This did not refer to the second night of bombing but to the deliberate dynamiting of buildings in some of the Lancashire town's main business streets, to stop the flames spreading and to bring down walls that were in danger of collapsing. This seems at odds with normal news values, which would have reported the raid of 23/24 December, but it fits in with the determination seen in the *Manchester Guardian* to suggest there had been only one night of bombing. It also served to show that the authorities were doing something positive and thereby showing resilience. The story admitted that by morning 'a number of buildings' had been either destroyed or badly damaged, and that 'some firemen' were killed. The introduction to the story began by emphasising the non-military status of the targets:

Hospitals, two shelters, and a number of shops, houses and commercial buildings in a Lancashire town were damaged or destroyed in another heavy raid on the North-West last night.<sup>66</sup>

The report's cross-heads included 'Church burnt out' and 'Four halls hit', civilian targets.

The reporting generally was a case of minimising bad things happening in Britain, maximising the bad things happening to Germany, maximising the good things happening to 'us', minimising the good things happening to 'them', an example of the Van Dijk's ideological square.<sup>67</sup> This edition also contained the familiar theme of hitting back at the Germans. Another deck of the page-lead headlines claimed: 'Bomber brought down at Old Trafford'.<sup>68</sup> There was no source for this story, which was slightly less strong than the headline: the bomber was only 'reported to have been brought down'. A scrupulous sub-editor would want quotation

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<sup>65</sup> 'Buildings Dynamited in Lancashire Town', *Manchester Evening News*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Van Dijk, 'Opinions and Ideologies', p. 35.

<sup>68</sup> 'Buildings Dynamited in Lancashire Town', *Manchester Evening News*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

marks round 'brought down at Old Trafford', to indicate some uncertainty. 'Transport keeps on' was another cross-head, emphasising a claim that 'transport is functioning almost normally'. There was no mention of the fact that railway stations and the main bus depot had been hit the previous night. The picture of traffic functioning 'almost normally' was put into question by the back-page' lead on the previous night's paper (23 December) which had appealed to motorists to give lifts to stranded pedestrians.<sup>69</sup>

The 24 December paper reinforced that message when it reported that drivers had entered into the spirit of 'free lifts' that morning:

It was a common sight to see people being driven into town, smartly dressed typists crowded in with workers in their rough clothing. But all were smiling, and it is almost impossible to speak too highly of the way Lancashire folk have faced up to the intensive raiding with real courage.<sup>70</sup>

The needs of propaganda included showing that the different classes worked cheerfully together for the common cause, a picture exposed as idealised when Home Intelligence and Mass Observation reporters described a different landscape.

Manchester people put out of work by the previous night's bombing were provided with a role-model in a story tied with the lead: 'Work gone, they helped hungry tired A. R. P. men'.<sup>71</sup> Citizens were assured that their forces were retaliating on land, at sea and in the air: There were headlines on 'Navy planes sink two ships' and 'Our night fighters are scoring'.<sup>72</sup> This last headline reflected wishful thinking: Britain had no specially-designed night fighters at that time.<sup>73</sup> There were very few interceptions. Another reference to inflicting damage on the Germans appeared in a reference to the noise of the ground defences (the anti-aircraft guns, which had a distinctive sound).

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<sup>69</sup> 'Manchester SOS to Motorists is 'Give Lifts'', *Manchester Evening News*, 23 December 1940, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> 'Buildings Dynamited in Lancashire Town', *Manchester Evening News*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> 'Work Gone, They Helped Hungry Tired A. R. P. Men', *Manchester Evening News*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> 'Navy Planes Sink Two Ships' and 'Our Night Fighters are Scoring', *Manchester Evening News*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now*, p. 35.

In the same edition, another propaganda message came in the form of civic pride at the foot of the front page. A message to citizens, stated to be from ‘the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Alderman R. G. Edwards’, blew away the censorial smokescreen of ‘a Lancashire town’. The Mayor, having made an extensive tour of the city, was ‘profoundly impressed’ by the way citizens had faced the ordeals they had suffered. He paid tribute to the ‘untiring’ work done and still being done by all branches of the civil defence.<sup>74</sup> This showed the newspaper performing its wartime role as a line of communication between authorities and public. It could also have shown any enemy agents, by the Mayor’s references to ‘an extensive tour’, and ‘untiring’ work, that the *Luftwaffe* had identified and attacked its intended target, causing widespread damage.

### 3.3 *Evening Chronicle*

The *Evening Chronicle* of 23 December 1940 had to search hard for the positive, as the three decks of headlines testified:

SAVAGE GERMAN AIR ATTACK MADE ON MANCHESTER

MANY FIRES IN CITY 12-HOUR BLITZ

TWO GERMANS DOWN, ONE IN SEA OFF BLACKPOOL<sup>75</sup>

The introduction read: ‘Manchester had its longest and most severe aerial bombardment last night, and after a 12 hours’ Blitz a pall of smoke hung over the city today. A church and other historic buildings were damaged.’ The description of the bombers’ approach to the city – how they ‘spread fanwise over a wide area, and adopted the familiar tactics of flare-dropping, followed by incendiaries and high explosives’ – had almost exactly the same wording as the report in the *Manchester*

<sup>74</sup> ‘True Citizens’, *Manchester Evening News*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Savage German Air Attack Made on Manchester’, *Evening Chronicle*, 23 December 1940, p.1.

*Evening News*, and must have come from the same source, probably an official one.<sup>76</sup>

There was no attempt to play down the raid, which was described as ‘savage’ and lasting 12 hours, although there was a clear emphasis on attributing negative characteristics on the Germans. The placing of the damage to ‘a church and other historic buildings’ in the introduction showed the *Luftwaffe* in a bad light and lower down in the report there were references to hotels, commercial premises, business houses, shops, stores, cinemas and schools being ‘victims of indiscriminate bombing’. High-explosives and incendiaries ‘dealt death to people and destruction to property’.<sup>77</sup>

The degradation of ‘them’ continued in the leader on page two which began: ‘The Blitz has come again to the north, following the usual Nazi pattern of concentrating not on military objects but on ancient and historic buildings, business premises and residential areas.’<sup>78</sup> Note that it was normative behaviour, and that the Germans were not damaging local landmarks by accident, thus offering an interesting contrast with the story alongside about an RAF attack on Mannheim. Here the bombed areas were ports, aerodromes, docks, barges, railway yards, goods yards, munitions works, oil stores and factories. Yet, Robert Kee, a British airman, articulated the contradictions between his experience and what was appearing in his newspaper in his diary in 1941:

I’ve now been on many raids where owing to total cloud it’s been impossible to do anything but fling the bombs out somewhere near the flak and the searchlights, and yet I have invariably read the next morning of ‘attacks on rail communications or industrial premises’.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> ‘Foiling the Raiders’, *Evening Chronicle*, 23 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Mercury on a Fork’. *Listener*, 18 Feb 1971, p. 208, cited in Fussell, *Wartime*, p.16; The conditions of wartime reporting work made this double standard almost unavoidable. Manchester journalists (and, at that time, even the RAF) knew nothing of the details of civilian casualties in Germany, nor the number of German civilian targets such as homes, churches and hospitals that were hit. The reporters had to take the Air Ministry’s version of RAF bombing efficiency at face value.

The leader went on to claim that the aim of the Germans, ‘as Manchester is now able to judge’, was to terrorise and cause dislocation.<sup>80</sup> This was propaganda, a reiteration of the crimes of the Nazis, but it could also be read as an admission that the bombing had this effect, or was threatening to have this effect, in Manchester.

No Second World War British newspaper could continue in the vein for very long, however, and local pride was evoked almost immediately, another element of the discourse between the newspaper and its readers. Keeble wrote that local pride is used by newspapers as a marketing strategy and the *Chronicle* gave an example: thanks to the precautions taken in Manchester, the ‘full blast of the Nazis’ enmity’ had been foiled.<sup>81</sup> The leader continued: ‘Manchester, a city proud of its record and of its preparations to meet attack, has maintained and more than maintained this standard of efficiency and heroism.’ This, as this thesis shows, was wishful thinking but it required scrupulous reading between the lines to detect deviations from the predominant message. ‘Those who have work should go to it,’ the leader continued, suggesting there had been some absenteeism, while the unemployed were urged stay at home and not go sight-seeing. It could be inferred that there had been some form of bomb-site tourism.

The demonization of the enemy is a common propaganda technique and the lead headline, across three columns, in the *Evening Chronicle* of 24 December conformed:

#### FIVE HOSPITALS HIT IN A NEW LANCASHIRE BLITZ

Churches, houses and business places suffer<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> ‘Foiling the Raiders’, *Evening Chronicle*, 23 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Keeble, *The Newspapers Handbook*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 8; ‘Foiling the Raiders’, *Evening Chronicle*, 23 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Five Hospitals Hit in a New Lancashire Blitz’, *Evening Chronicle*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

The message was reinforced by the copy. 'Five hospitals in two towns were among the places damaged by bombs', the introduction read, and the second paragraph added to the list of civilian targets: churches, houses, shops, business houses and public houses. At one point, the report stated, civil defence workers, particularly firemen, – local figures with no means to fight back – were machine-gunned by individual raiders, although no casualties were reported. The report also mentioned an 'oil bomb' falling into 'one of the town's thoroughfares', which contained business premises and shops.<sup>83</sup> The choice of 'thoroughfare', rather than 'road' or 'street', evoked an image of a fire-bomb in a busy area full of people.

Conventional news writing techniques would have concentrated on the deaths and the damage and it was an example of propaganda that the third paragraph of the story concentrated on retribution. One enemy plane was reported to have been brought down close to Old Trafford, Manchester, 'near to the cricket ground' – a detail that contrasted the Nazi war machine with the peaceful and most English of national games. Armstrong and Barth have stated that symbols are crucial to the survival of ethnic identification because they act as 'border guards' distinguishing 'us' from 'them' and there is an implicit evocation of a pre-war idyll of willow and leather and the vision of what the nation was fighting for.<sup>84</sup> The report also provided details of some of the victims. For example, in a 'rural district' Miss Harriet Lomas was killed by a bomb, while Mr and Mrs Harold Worth died sitting beside the fire in their farmhouse. The semiotics of phraseology were designed to paint a bucolic picture, to the target audience the victims were people 'like us'.

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<sup>83</sup> This would have been one of the German bombs that were filled with liquid mixtures, which could include petrol and crude oil (Wolfgang Fleischer, *German Air-Dropped Weapons to 1945* [Hinckley: Midland], p. 69).

<sup>84</sup> John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) and Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1969), cited in Anthony D. Smith *Nationalism and Modernism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), p. 182.

Like its local rivals, the *Evening Chronicle* provided role models, conforming to Jowett and O'Donnell's propaganda criteria in which messages seem to be more resonant when 'they seem to be coming from within the audience'.<sup>85</sup> The civil defence services 'went quickly into action', and fire-fighters worked 'heroically', as did nurses at one of the hospitals, who were 'heedless of the danger'.<sup>86</sup> There was special praise for the calmness of the nurses as they worked to transfer patients to safety after hospital walls were brought down by a bomb blast and hundreds of windows shattered. There were quotations from a soldier in hospital with bomb splinter injuries to his face and arms; from a man temporarily blinded by an incendiary bomb; and from another man suffering from burns sustained in rescuing three children. One patient was quoted as saying: 'If only Hitler could see how these nurses behaved he would soon realise that all his bombs cannot weaken the spirit of the British people.'<sup>87</sup> This quotation read like it was made up by the journalist, or, at the very least, prompted.

#### 4. The Post-Blitz Editions

##### 4.1 *Manchester Guardian*

There were no newspapers printed on 25 and 26 December 1940, Christmas and Boxing Day being traditional journalism holidays until the 1980s, and the German bombing offensive on Britain also came to a halt until the night of 27/28 December.<sup>88</sup> The hiatus allowed Manchester's newspapers an opportunity to reflect on the bombing of the city and the *Guardian* of 27 December was critical of

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<sup>85</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda*, p. 299.

<sup>86</sup> 'Lancashire Patients Praise Nurses who Removed Them', *Evening Chronicle*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Roy Greenslade, 'The Sun Publishes on Christmas Day' (*Guardian*, 2010) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2010/dec/23/sun-christmas>> [accessed 21 January 2013]; Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now*, pp. 355-56.



preparations, noting the failures in fire-watching on the night of 22/23 December<sup>89</sup> Its main criticism was aimed at industry rather than the authorities, however, recalling that the Ministry of Information had stated that the people responsible for certain buildings apparently neglected their legal obligation to provide an efficient service of fire watchers. It suggested that the Fire Watchers Order did not go far enough.

On page five a survey, dated 26 December, expressed in its introduction the propaganda values of carrying on, working together, and thus hitting back. It began: 'Manchester men and women have used the Christmas holiday to put right, so far as possible, what has been torn down and burnt out by the German bombs.' The 'carrying on' theme appeared again in the report insisting that the Christmas festivals at home have gone ahead 'somewhat normally'.<sup>90</sup> The reporter stated that it was not possible to name the places the bombs hit, implicitly telling the readers that his report was censored, but he was able to report that they included churches, chapels, eight infirmaries and hospitals, schools, various institutions and many commercial buildings, offices and homes. It is worth noting that, apart from 'homes', the list seemed to be given, consciously or unconsciously, in order of propaganda value. The placing of the emotionally-charged word 'homes' in the final position may even have been done for climactic value. A communiqué from the Air Ministry and Ministry of Home Security admitted that 'considerable damage was done' in the Monday night raid (on a Lancashire town). But preliminary reports, it was claimed, indicated that casualties were not heavy'.<sup>91</sup>

Examples of distorted news values were revealed by separate, small items. In one Captain David Drummond, chief officer of Manchester Fire Brigade, reported: 'I hope that the authorities will see that fire-watching parties will speedily be brought up

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<sup>89</sup> 'Manning Roofs', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> 'A Manchester Survey After the Attack', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> 'Monday Night's Air Attack', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 5.

to the strength which we had expected, and that they will be kept at their posts night and day.’<sup>92</sup> There is a lot of implied criticism in that statement and in normal circumstances it would be the basis of a big story. Here it was just four centimetres, including the headlines. In another report, the sinking of a Royal Navy ship was dealt with as a very small paragraph at the foot of the page: ‘The Board of Admiralty regrets to announce that HM Destroyer *Acheron* (Lieut J. R. Wilson RN) has been sunk. The next of kin of casualties have been informed.’<sup>93</sup> The ‘voice’ of this piece was clearly that of the Admiralty press release, not that of a journalist.

No Manchester newspaper reported what Home Intelligence was telling the Ministry of Information in January 1941, which will be examined in a later chapter, but there was evidence of Britain’s ‘Other Fleet Street’ making attempts to improve the mood in the city. On 30 January the *Manchester Guardian* headlines on page six read:

#### BUILDING THE NEW MANCHESTER

##### An Unexampled Opportunity to Tidy Up the City<sup>94</sup>

Under it the president of the Royal Institute of Builders and Architects, Mr W. H. Ansell, was paraphrased as saying: ‘The dictators would be entirely dis-satisfied if they knew that the result of their destructiveness had been to create a high resolve to build better cities and better lives.’<sup>95</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian*’s autopsy of the aftermath of the Blitz was equally upbeat. A reporter visited a centre housing nearly 1,000 people made homeless by the bombing, and quoted a 69-year-old widow saying she had been ‘sleeping warm and

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<sup>92</sup> ‘Fire-Watching Parties’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Destroyer Lost’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Building the New Manchester’, *Manchester Guardian*, 30 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

comfortable'.<sup>96</sup> The piece went on: 'At all centres visited the catering arrangements seem to be admirable. In every shelter in the city turkey was served for Christmas Day dinner.'<sup>97</sup> The Home Intelligence inspectors, who visited the city, were scathing: 'This, like many other press versions, is alas untrue.'<sup>98</sup>

#### 4.2 *Manchester Evening News*

If the *Manchester Guardian* surprised the Home Intelligence inspectors, the last edition extra of the *Manchester Evening News* probably dismayed its audience. The newspaper comprised six pages and the most surprising element was the shortage of news about the Manchester Blitz, filling less than 15 per cent of the editorial copy. There were no reports on the aftermath of the bombing on the front page, the lead story being the report of an attack by the Japanese navy.<sup>99</sup> By modern editorial standards, which, despite 24-hour news, insist on lingering over disasters whether wartime or natural, this inclination to move on from the city's struggles is a surprising example of news values. The other main reports on the page were overt examples of propaganda.<sup>100</sup> Signs of the hand of the censors, who insisted on minimising reports of suffering, were manifest, but a Manchester newspaper could have found news stories amid the bombed-out buildings and chose not to. It is as if the *Manchester Evening News* wished to find a new focus as quickly as possible.

The city's plight was reserved to page three and a report headed 'All Manchester homeless will be re-housed again in few days time', although those who could detect good news in that headline would also have to contemplate the

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<sup>96</sup> 'Manchester's Rest Centres', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>99</sup> 'Enemy Raider Shells Pacific Phosphate Isle' *Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> 'RAF bomb Bordeaux' and 'Officer on defeatist talk charge', *Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 1940, p. 1

counterpoint of the report next to it: 'Last chance for child evacuation'.<sup>101</sup> This would have been a sobering thought for the parents of the 80,000 Mancunian children who had to choose between sending their children to strangers or to keep them in a city that might be targeted by the *Luftwaffe* at any time. The *Evening News* was determined to find the silver lining, however, and the potential boom for one of the city's main thoroughfares, Oxford Road, provided it. It read:

Manchester's Blitz is likely to bring an unexpected prosperity to the Oxford Road area. It is estimated that about 100 houses and shops are empty in that area and already firms are making inquiries with the object of taking over these vacant properties.<sup>102</sup>

A more accurate comment came in the private diary of the *Evening News*'s editor three days later. 'The city still has not resumed its normal life,' Haley wrote, strongly contrasting what his newspaper was reporting.<sup>103</sup> Mancunians could read these headlines while witnessing the chaos of their own city that was only hinted at in their newspapers – 'From today it is no longer necessary to boil water for drinking purposes' – and make comparisons with reports of the alleged damage being done to German cities and towns.<sup>104</sup> For example, the principal headline on 28 December had read:

#### MORE NEWS OF HAVOC IN BERLIN AND PORTS

##### Accuracy of the RAF Bombing<sup>105</sup>

Three days later the *Evening News* was making more mountains from rubble in its leader: 'Hitler has promised complete victory, Churchill promised nothing. Therein lies one of the weaknesses of his position. The Dictatorships must have triumphs or their hold weakens. Spectacles must take the place of bread. Without

<sup>101</sup> 'All Manchester Homeless will be Re-Housed Again in Few Days Time' and 'Last Chance for Child Evacuation', *Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> 'Oxford Road May Boom Again', *Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> Churchill Archives, Haley, 30 December 1940.

<sup>104</sup> 'Water Need Not Be Boiled Now', *Manchester Evening News*, 10 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>105</sup> 'More News of Havoc in Berlin and Ports', *Manchester Evening News*, 28 December 1940, p. 1.

conquests they die.’<sup>106</sup> Later it read: ‘We, too, have been assaulted and we have not cracked.’ The attempt to restore morale included official visits. Wendell Willkie, who had stood against Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1940 United States election and who became an international ambassador for the American president, toured Manchester in February. ‘I’ll tell the States they’re not downhearted here,’ he was reported as saying.<sup>107</sup>

### 4.3 *Evening Chronicle*

Just as the *Evening News* appeared to abandon normal journalistic practices by switching its news focus from Manchester prematurely, the *Evening Chronicle* also moved on in its 27 December edition. There were just six reports on the city’s Blitz, which accounted, in terms of column centimetres, for around one page of a six-page newspaper, approximately 16 per cent. There were no photographs. Unlike the *Evening News*, the lead story in the *Evening Chronicle* did focus on the city. The headline ‘Manchester Gets Down to Work Behind Boards’ extended over three columns, while the introduction read: ‘Manchester is rapidly assuming its normal workday aspect after the Blitz. Its countenance may be scarred and in some parts battered, but the people, after the Christmas respite, returned to work with determination.’<sup>108</sup> The message chimed with the ‘Manchester can take it’ discourse and might have stirred admiration in parts of the city that had escaped relatively unscathed, but for the grieving and the homeless this must have come across as blatant untruths, and possibly offensive. The cross-heads ‘Schools to reopen’ and ‘Archbishop’s tribute’ were also designed to be upbeat and the only jarring note in the

<sup>106</sup> ‘1941’, *Manchester Evening News*, 1 January 1941, p. 2

<sup>107</sup> ‘Willkie to Manchester: Your Spirit is Grand’, *Manchester Evening News*, 3 February 1941, p. 1

<sup>108</sup> ‘Manchester Gets Down to Work Behind Boards’, *Evening Chronicle*, 27 December 1940, p. 1.

report was the sentence: 'A mass funeral will be held at Southern Cemetery tomorrow.'

The propaganda techniques of the *Evening Chronicle* were to ignore the worst aspects of the bombing and to 'other' the enemy. On page three the main headline read 'Christmas post beats the Blitz', stressing a return to normality, while a sports report on the following page recorded a new challenge for Manchester United, because they were now playing their home games at Stockport County's Edgeley Park.<sup>109</sup> There was no mention that United's ground was unusable because of bombing.<sup>110</sup> Ten days later there was evidence of an inclination to ascribe animal-like language to the enemy as identified by Jowett and O'Donnell.<sup>111</sup> 'Defenders creep out of cave', one headline read, describing surrendering Italians, with the underhand and sinister connotations contained in the word 'creep'. 'Cave', too, has a primitive or sub-human undertone to it. In comparison, the same report highlighted the overt bravery of the Allies, the subsidiary headline reading: 'Australians went into battle singing'.<sup>112</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

This study of Manchester's newspapers pre and post Blitz reveals that there was a wholesale attempt to massage the truth for propaganda purposes. A Home Intelligence report in February 1941 quoted a remark '(private of course) by a famous columnist'.<sup>113</sup> It read: 'Journalists report the cheers. No one dare report the tears', and this was borne out by Manchester's newspapers from December 1940 to February

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<sup>109</sup> 'Christmas Post Beats the Blitz', *Evening Chronicle*, 27 December 1940, p. 3

<sup>110</sup> 'Big Task Ahead of United', *Evening Chronicle*, 27 December 1940, p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda*, p. 303.

<sup>112</sup> 'Defenders Creep out of Cave', *Evening Chronicle*, 6 January 1941, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> Mass Observation, FR 568.

1941.<sup>114</sup> There was more than one raid on Manchester, although reports suggested otherwise; casualties were worse than reported; the destruction to factories and the city's infrastructure was minimised; efforts were made to increase the success of air defences; shortcomings in fire fighting were virtually ignored; heroes were plentiful and promoted; the *Luftwaffe*'s successes were dismissed as rare; and it was civilian rather than industrial targets that were hit. All were distortions designed to maintain morale and demonize the enemy.

The censor was sitting in the offices of the *Manchester Evening News* to monitor the copy coming out in the city's newspapers, but there is little in the editions to suggest journalists were pushing at the boundaries of what would have been considered acceptable. Indeed senior journalists congratulated themselves on the service they provided. On 27 December 1940, with Manchester's newspapers moving their attention beyond local problems, Crozier wrote to his *Manchester Evening News* counterpart Haley:

You were saying the other night that the appearance of newspapers after a heavy raid was a powerful agent in steadying people's nerves. I have two interesting pieces of evidence.

1 An air-raid warden, who at a Christmas gathering said that he and his friends were overjoyed when they got the four-page MG [*Manchester Guardian*], because they thought that if the MG came out 'with all its features' after such a night, Manchester must still be standing firm.

2 At the aircraft place where my daughter works, various directors and bosses came up to her, knowing of her connection with me, and expressed high delight at having received the paper. Some of them had not received it until pretty late, but they felt retrospectively that it had been a great comfort after they had been fearing the worst sort of news.<sup>115</sup>

This tied in with McNair and Boyd-Barrett's assertions about the shared values of political and journalistic elites, but the self-congratulation came at a cost.<sup>116</sup> Billig

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Crozier to Haley, 27 December 1940.

<sup>116</sup> McNair, *News and Journalism*, p. 68; Boyd-Barrett, 'Understanding', p. 29.

wrote that the metonymic image of banal nationalism 'is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging un-noticed on the public building' and, by following Fleet Street's lead, Manchester's newspapers pushed propaganda to the point that it became so institutionalised in the rhetoric of politicians, the editorials in the comment pages and the favoured narratives within the reporting of news that it became the norm. Home Intelligence reports showed the consequence was that trust in the press was eroded.



## Chapter 7

### All in this Together?

#### 1. Introduction

The expression ‘we’re all in this together’ is a legacy of the Second World War and stemmed from the notion that the conflict removed the social barriers of the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Food was rationed, privilege was removed and if your name was on one of the millions of bombs dropped by the *Luftwaffe* then it did not matter if it was double-barrelled or prefixed by a title. It is an impression of equality that has been questioned by historians, Calder and Gardiner among them. Ponting wrote:

One of the central myths of 1940, cultivated at the time and embellished since, was that Britain was galvanised by crisis to change old ways of working, and became united as never before, with a strong bond of equality of sacrifice... The reality was very different.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will examine the alleged unity of purpose, which is one of the myths deriving from the Blitz, setting out the national context before turning to look at the situation in Manchester expressed in and through the city’s newspapers. It will examine the social conditions in Britain in the Second World War, the support for the war, the anti-German and Italian backlash and the psychological consequences of the aerial bombardment. One reaction was an increase in crime as individuals across a wide spectrum took advantage of the blackout and the reduced numbers of police, an indicator of a society fractured by the extremes of war. The chapter will also examine readers’ letters, a dialogue between the audience and the press, to examine if the strains on the community and voices at odds with the message of togetherness were given a forum.

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<sup>1</sup> The expression ‘we’re all in this together’ came originally from the US, where it became a common war cry in the Second World War before spreading to Britain (National WW2 Museum <<http://www.nationalww2museum.org/history/pearlharbor.html>> [accessed 11 March 2013]).

<sup>2</sup> Ponting, 1940, p. 138.

## 2. The Social Divide

As the previous chapter suggested, Britain entered the war in 1939 with considerable social problems. Unemployment had blighted a generation, an economic burden that even re-armament from 1938 could not cure quickly. In January 1940 1.3m people were unemployed, a year later 653,000 were still out of work and the figure did not drop to below 200,000 until June 1941.<sup>3</sup> The surplus workforce did not soothe industrial relations and even in 1941, with Britain near its lowest ebb, more than a million days were lost to strikes. This rose to 3.7m in 1944, a figure not matched again until 1955.<sup>4</sup> Inflation also took a toll on household incomes, average prices rising 19 per cent in 1940 compared to an 11 per cent increase in salaries.<sup>5</sup> The consequence was deep deprivation in some of the poorer areas, MP Russell Thomson reporting to Parliament in 1942 that 25 per cent of children in Merseyside were living below the poverty line and that a doctor in West Sussex had found that 72 per cent of the elementary school children were living below the line of nutrition laid down by the Children's Minimum Council.<sup>6</sup> Research at Christ's Hospital, a public school in Sussex, revealed that its pupils were 2.4 inches (6.1 centimetres) taller at the age of 13 than comparable boys at elementary schools. The benefit of a good diet became even more pronounced at 17 when the difference in height was 3.8 inches (9.7 centimetres).<sup>7</sup>

Other evidence countered the myth of equality. Hastings stated that: 'Privileged Britons remained privileged indeed. "The extraordinary thing about the war was that people who really didn't want to be involved in it were not," the novelist

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<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, HL Debate, 5 March 1940, 115, cols 734-65; Butler and Sloman, *Political Facts*, p. 341; Ponting, 1940, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup> Butler and Sloman, *Political Facts*, p. 341.

<sup>5</sup> Ponting, 1940, p. 138.

<sup>6</sup> *Hansard*, HC Debate, 30 June 1942, 381, cols 38-182.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Anthony Powell wrote afterwards.<sup>8</sup> Affluent parents sent 17,000 children abroad in the six months after June 1940, in the army former public schoolboys were 14 times more likely to be officers, the navy reserved half of its officer cadet places for public schoolboys and the officer class of the RAF were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and first class rail travel while sergeant pilots, predominantly from the lower classes, received only the Distinguished Flying Medal and a third class railway carriage.<sup>9</sup> Until November 1940 work at the Foreign Office did not start until 11 am while at the Ministry of Economic Warfare a memo had to be sent out insisting staff were at their desks by 10 am.<sup>10</sup>

Knightley wrote that the Blitz was not the great social leveller: 'The protection a Londoner got from German bombs depended on how much money he had.'<sup>11</sup> An American journalist Ralph Ingersoll recalled visiting a shelter on the Isle of Dogs to find just six buckets acting as toilets for 8,000 people. These overflowed on to the floor where people were sleeping. 'The whole experience shocked so that it numbed,' he wrote, before driving to the Dorchester Hotel in the West End where guests were housed in individual and comfortable beds in an underground area that had been the hotel's Turkish baths. There he noticed that one berth had a note pinned to its curtain reading 'Reserved for Lord Halifax', the Foreign Secretary.<sup>12</sup>

While the British public largely supported the war – an opinion poll conducted by the British Institute of Public Opinion in October 1939 found that 89 per cent

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<sup>8</sup> Hastings, *All Hell*, p. 342; Anthony Powell, *A Writer's Handbook* (London: Heinemann, 2001), p. 94, cited in Hastings, *All Hell*, pp. 342-43.

<sup>9</sup> Ponting, *1940*, pp. 148-49; Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 58

<sup>10</sup> Ponting, *1940*, p. 141.

<sup>11</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 261.

<sup>12</sup> *The Home Front: An Anthology 1938-1945*, ed. by N. Longmate (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981), p. 78.

favoured fighting ‘until Hitlerism goes’ – the reaction was not uniform.<sup>13</sup> Home Intelligence reported there was little national unity at the start of the war and, initially at least, many had grave misgivings about the conflict.<sup>14</sup> In December 1939 a Manchester student reported to Mass Observation that the war was a ‘taboo’ subject in his family, adding: ‘I still don’t support it, but my family... seem to forget all the dirty tricks (in my opinion) which they [the government] played before.’<sup>15</sup> Three months later a railway draughtsman reporting from Wilmslow, 14 miles south of Manchester, wrote: ‘I suppose I must agree that the WAR AIMS [his capitals] of the orthodox propagandists are reasonable, but somehow I feel no enthusiasm... I am mostly floundering around, undecided and sad.’<sup>16</sup> Nationally, the sceptics included members of the far left and right, Irish republicans and even miners, who harboured grievances against Churchill dating back to the General Strike.<sup>17</sup>

There was also the peace movement. Nearly 130,000 Britons had joined the Peace Pledge Union by the outbreak of war in 1939 and the above Wilmslow Mass Observation correspondent, surveying Manchester’s bomb damage, felt aggrieved enough about the government’s efforts to preserve peace to write in January 1941: ‘I must say that all this destruction of cities is no more than England deserves for its wanton destruction of the League of Nations.’<sup>18</sup> The government put pressure on the BBC and Fleet Street to ensure that Peace Pledge Union voices remained virtually unheard, Bingham noting that Vera Brittain, who advocated a pacifist stance even during the war, found it difficult to find space in newspapers to promote her views, as

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<sup>13</sup> War Morale, 6 October 1939, cited in Sheila Elizabeth Rosemary Watson, ‘The Ministry of Information and the Home Front in Britain 1939-42’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1980), p. 189.

<sup>14</sup> Mass Observation, FR 568.

<sup>15</sup> Mass Observation, D5104, Male Student, 16 December, 1939.

<sup>16</sup> Mass Observation, D5199, G. W. Shipway, 31 March 1940.

<sup>17</sup> Calder, *Myth*, pp. 65-89.

<sup>18</sup> David C. Lukowitz, ‘British Pacifists and Appeasement: The Peace Pledge Union’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9, 1 (1974), 115-127 (p. 117); Mass Observation, D5199, Shipway, 17 January 1941.

she was ‘perceived to be challenging the “national interest”’.<sup>19</sup> A reader’s letter in the *Manchester Guardian* was a potential indicator of a national mood of intolerance. It read:

By its action in protecting the public from the pernicious singing of the Orpheus Choir under the direction of the pacifist Sir Hugh Robertson the BBC has earned the plaudits of all prudent patriots. It therefore came as a great shock to read in the *Radio Times* that a lifelong pacifist Sir Arthur Eddington was actually being allowed to disseminate his insidious astronomical theories in a talk with the significant title ‘Other Worlds’. Should not the person responsible for subjecting the nation to so grave a risk be immediately removed from office?<sup>20</sup>

There is scant indication there of latitude or forgiveness, and little was shown to Germans, some of them Jews who had fled their native country to escape Hitler’s persecution, and Italians, whose shops, including those in Manchester, were ransacked. Many were imprisoned in the Isle of Man or in a makeshift prison camp in Warth Mills, a wrecked and rat-infested cotton mill in Bury, nine miles north of Manchester.<sup>21</sup> In July 1940 more than a thousand of these prisoners set sail from Liverpool for Canadian internment on the *Arandora Star* and 600 perished when they were torpedoed by a U Boat off the coast of Ireland. The dead included a well-known German socialist opponent of Hitler and the secretary of the Italian League of the Rights of Man.<sup>22</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* reported that there had been panic among the internees, adding: ‘There was great hostility between the Germans and Italians, and even on board the rescue ship they had to be guarded by British troops to prevent them from coming to blows.’<sup>23</sup> According to the *Daily Express*:

Soldiers and sailors...told of panic among the aliens when they realised the ship was sinking. All condemned the cowardice of the Germans, who fought madly to get into the boats. ‘The Germans, fighting with Italians to escape, were great hulking brutes,’ said one soldier. ‘They punched and kicked their way past the Italians. We had to restrain them forcibly... But the Italians were just as bad. The

<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 125; Bingham, *Gender*, p. 208.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Pacifists and Broadcasting’, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 January 1941, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> ‘Shipload of Internees Torpedoed’, *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1940, p. 5.

whole mob thought of their own skins first. The scramble for the boats was sickening.’<sup>24</sup>

A subsequent investigation proved this account to be wholly false and this, coupled with similar excesses by the press, eventually changed the national mood and the proportion of the public in favour of internment fell from 55 per cent in July 1940 to 30 per cent in August.<sup>25</sup>

If the public’s antagonism to British-based Germans and Italians moderated, there is evidence that anti-Semitism was more ingrained. Mass Observation found evidence of anti-Semitism among more than 55 per cent of respondents in one survey, suggesting that Britons could divorce their opposition to Hitler from their anti-Jewish sentiments.<sup>26</sup> A Home Intelligence report in 1943 stated there was ‘much latent anti-Semitism’:

The Manchester *Daily Dispatch*, for instance, published a letter in which it was suggested Jewish names predominated in black market prosecutions, army dodging trials, clothing coupon rackets, petrol ramps and the like, the writer suggesting that the Jews should be put in their place.<sup>27</sup>

An investigator reported this letter was widely discussed and quoted various remarks, including ‘there’s no doubt they (the Jews) have too much power’, ‘stinking lot of cowards they are, the Jews’ and ‘Jews shops are always stocked up’.<sup>28</sup> An accompanying survey of Mass Observation’s national panel of observers – credited in the report as: ‘a section of the population more intelligent and better informed’ – revealed that only 25 per cent of them felt ‘favourable’ towards Jews and even as late as January 1944 another Mass Observation survey revealed that 24 per cent of the population wanted stricter controls on the activities of British Fascists but only two

<sup>24</sup> ‘Germans Torpedo Germans’, *Daily Express*, 4 July 1940, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Mass Observation, FR 1648, *Recent Trends in Anti-Semitism*, March 1943.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

per cent saw the need for curbs on anti-Semitism.<sup>29</sup> Societies and clubs openly excluded Jews and the author Douglas Reed used anti-Semitic themes in his novels, including *Insanity Fair*, published in 1938, the storyline for which had Jews taking over London.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly for this thesis, Reed ended the war as the foreign editor for Kemsley Newspapers, the publishers of Manchester's *Evening Chronicle*, despite his association with extreme anti-Semitic organisations.<sup>31</sup>

Ironically, the bombing of the capital initially centred on the East End, which before the war had provided a geographical foundation for the anti-Semitic British Union of Fascists.<sup>32</sup> This was a poor area largely comprising Victorian slums and so densely populated that 200,000 people lived in Stepney, for example, at an average of 12 people per dwelling.<sup>33</sup> 'Everybody is worried about the feeling in the East End,' Nicolson wrote in his diary on 17 September, 'where there is much bitterness. It is said that even the King and Queen were booed the other day when they visited the destroyed areas.'<sup>34</sup> There was profound anger in the bombed areas of Stepney, West Ham, Poplar and London Docks that did not spill over into total panic, but was a long way removed from the popular image of the wisecracking Cockney undaunted by the destruction.<sup>35</sup> Bernard Kops, a boy in the East End, recalled the awfulness of seeking an undignified and cramped shelter on London Tube platforms:

Some people feel a certain nostalgia for those days, recall a poetic dream about the Blitz. They talk about those days as if they were time of true communal spirit. Not to me. It was the beginning of an era of utter terror, of fear and horror.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*; Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Reed, *Insanity Fair* (London: Cape, 1938).

<sup>31</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Dorril, *Black Shirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 394.

<sup>33</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 164.

<sup>34</sup> Nicolson, *Diaries*, p. 112.

<sup>35</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, pp. 26-35

<sup>36</sup> Longmate, *Home Front*, p. 66.

Calder stated that certain versions of the Blitz suggested ‘it was a mean and pusillanimous Londoner indeed who did not emerge from the debris with a wisecrack on his lips’.<sup>37</sup> He noted, however, that it was often hysteria that produced the witty remarks and often the purveyors of this earthy humour were found sobbing uncontrollably a few hours later. For example, William Sansom cited an anecdote where an elderly woman refused to leave her stew-pot she was stirring amid the ruins of her bombed-out house. To humour her, a stretcher-bearer agreed to taste her food only to find the pan was full of plaster and bricks.<sup>38</sup>

When Coventry was badly bombed on 14 November, the *Daily Express* reported the city was stricken ‘but keeps its courage and sanity’.<sup>39</sup> Three Home Intelligence inspectors disagreed:

There were more open signs of hysteria, terror, neurosis, observed in one evening than during the whole of the past two months together in all areas. Women were seen to cry, to scream, to tremble all over, to faint in the street, to attack a fireman, and so on. The overwhelmingly dominant feeling on Friday was the feeling of utter helplessness... There were several signs of suppressed panic as darkness approached. In two cases people were seen to be fighting to get on to cars, which they thought would take them out into the country, though in fact, the drivers insisted, the cars were just going up the road to the garage.<sup>40</sup>

Knightley wrote that the reaction of the local population was ignored because it did not fit the myth.<sup>41</sup> Newspapers were complicit in this, often without urging from the authorities yet, curiously, obliquely acknowledged the destruction of Coventry, and the German use of *Coventration* or *Coventried*, later in the war:

British newspapers, adept as always at turning the serious into the trivial, made many cute usages in aid of morale. One was the term *Coventried* to describe any place as bomb-ruined as Coventry. This led ultimately to such a headline as ‘Hamburg has been Hamburgered’.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 187.

<sup>38</sup> William Sansom, *The Blitz: Westminster at War*, 3rd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> ‘A Very Gallant City’, *Daily Express*, 16 November 1940, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Mass Observation, FR 495.

<sup>41</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 262.

<sup>42</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, p.148.



One psychiatrist estimated that children who stayed in Bristol were eight times more likely to be psychologically disturbed than those who were evacuated and there are other disturbing statistics testifying to the mental strain the bombing imposed.<sup>43</sup> There was a 100 per cent rise in the number of teenage girls arrested in the three years after 1939, more infants than usual were suffocated in their cots or choked on their food, more children were killed on the roads even though there were fewer cars and more children drowned. Paradoxically, the suicide rate fell.<sup>44</sup>

### 3. Crime and Newspaper Coverage of the Courts

Reported crimes rose from 303,711 in England and Wales in 1939 to 478,394 in 1945 and the number of people convicted went up 54 per cent.<sup>45</sup> Police numbers in England and Wales fell from 82,232 to 59,574 during the war, and the average age rose as younger constables were conscripted, but the high number of convictions points to a significant increase in criminal acts and to the numbers attracted by crime.<sup>46</sup> Duncan Campbell, a former crime correspondent for *The Guardian*, said on BBC Radio: 'In many ways the war was a criminal watershed. Hundreds of emergency regulations protected the nation but many were seen as petty, even ludicrous, and led to a loss of respect for the law.'<sup>47</sup>

The imposition of rationing and the consequent black market led to a rise in pilfering from work, threefold in Birkenhead docks during 1940, and shortly after the outbreak of war 500 policemen had to be sent to France to stop mass thefts from the British Expeditionary Force.<sup>48</sup> There were looters raiding bombed out houses in

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<sup>43</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 225.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 154

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Bandits of the Blitz* (BBC Radio 4).

<sup>48</sup> Ponting, *1940*, p. 142.

search of recoverable booty and on 8 March 1941 a notorious incident occurred when two bombs hit the underground *Café de Paris*, in the West End, when it was packed with Canadian nurses and young officers on leave, killing 34.<sup>49</sup> Delays by the emergency services led to an inquiry and several unsavory incidents, including rings and jewelry being stripped from dead bodies by thieves.<sup>50</sup>

Although Lord Northcliffe was not the first to realise the importance of crime reporting to newspapers – the historian Dr Andrew Cook has put forward the theory that Jack The Ripper was a forgery invented by journalists who linked a series of unrelated murders in 1888 to boost circulations – the founder of the *Daily Mail*, did articulate the attraction of courts and justice to editors.<sup>51</sup> Williams wrote: ‘He placed great emphasis on crime stories as a staple feature of the paper. Crime featured prominently with interviews with murderers as well as the police. Northcliffe’s motto was “get me a murder a day”.’<sup>52</sup>

Court reporting is a staple item in every newspaper because it forms easily and regularly acquired copy and because ‘courts are a marvellous source of human interest and crime stories’.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the study period, the *Manchester Guardian*, *Manchester Evening News* and the *Evening Chronicle* gave significant amounts of space to reporting the courts, devoting approximately a page in the case of the evening newspapers and around half a page in the *Guardian*. In a time when much of the news was subject to censorship and travel and communication were complicated by air raids and bomb damage, the attraction of guaranteed news stories that could be reported without restriction, other than those that normally applied to court reporting, was obvious.

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<sup>49</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 323.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 324.

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Cook, *Jack The Ripper: Case Closed*. (Stroud: Amberley, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> Keeble, *Handbook*, p. 173.

All three newspapers reported court cases at length, becoming what Keeble described as ‘part of the judicial process’, as publicising the crime adds ‘public shame to the punishment’. None of the newspapers made the link between the special circumstances of war and the degree of lawlessness they provoked, however, and in doing so they failed to fulfil the role accorded to journalism that McNair described as the ‘orderly reproduction of democratic societies’.<sup>54</sup> Hylton noted: ‘There were new classes of offence for people to commit in a heavily regulated wartime society, and the opportunity to commit them was enhanced by the cover of the blackout and the substantial reduction in police numbers.’<sup>55</sup> This was reflected in the reports in Manchester’s newspapers, most notably on 1 January 1941 when the *Guardian* reported the comments of Noel B. Goldie, the Recorder at Manchester Quarter Sessions. The judicial officer noted there were 56 youths before him on indictable offences and said ‘something had to be done’. He added:

I have no doubt that in the first instance it was due to a lack of parental control, but I have a strong suspicion that receivers in this great city are using youths for the purpose of committing these most serious offences... We are, in Manchester at the moment breeding a race of young criminals.<sup>56</sup>

On 9 January the *Manchester Evening News* contributed to this debate under the headline ‘Looting becoming serious in Manchester, court told’.<sup>57</sup> On the same page it was noted that Manchester had suffered a three-fold increase in crime in a three-month period, Recorder Goldie blaming a lack of parental control: ‘It is not merely an increase in petty pilfering. We are now getting serious crimes such as breaking and entering. And the boys who are responsible show complete hardness

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*; McNair, *News and Journalism*, p. 38.

<sup>55</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 154.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Manchester Breeding Young Criminals’, *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1941, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Looting Becomes Serious in Manchester, Court Told’, *Manchester Evening News*, 9 January 1941, p. 6.

when they are caught.<sup>58</sup> Below the story were other headlines: ‘50-mile joy ride in van’, ‘Roaming town like wild things’, ‘Gas meters robbed in bombed houses’ and ‘Father suspected own son’.<sup>59</sup> All the accused were aged between nine and 14.

Later that month the *Manchester Evening News* columnist Eileen Elias commented:

The gangsters are here. No, this is not something from an American film. Police, parents and magistrates wish it were. It is just a plain statement of fact about the country today in the midst of war.

For juvenile crime is on the increase. In Manchester alone during the past three months it has trebled. Never before have we been faced with so serious a problem in the life of young Britain.<sup>60</sup>

Other than references to breaks in education and the lack of parental control caused by absentee parents, including called-up fathers, no link was made to the effect of raids on young attitudes. However, Roy Lee, a teenager in 1940, articulated the sense of life’s pointlessness once his best friend Matthew was killed in the Manchester Blitz:

When he went my clock stopped ticking. I remember saying to myself: ‘That’s it. No matter what happens now it could be me tomorrow.’ I made up my mind there and then to live for me and my mum and to hell with everyone else.<sup>61</sup>

Lee and his friends would wait for the all clear and then loot bombed-out buildings.

He added:

Obviously money was the first thing you looked for, and then, of course, there was always food, packets of tea and this, that and the other, anything that had been blown up in people’s kitchens. You never handed it back. Anything that was worthwhile we just stuck in our pockets and away we’d go.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> ‘Young Crime Trebles Since September’, *Manchester Evening News*, 9 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> ‘50-Mile Joy Ride in Van’, ‘Roaming Town Like Wild Things’, ‘Gas Meters Robbed in Bombed Houses’ and ‘Father Suspected Own Son’, *Manchester Evening News*, 9 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Eileen Elias, ‘The Gangsters are Here’, *Manchester Evening News*, 20 January 1941, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Secrets of the Blitz*, dir. by Steve Humphries (Channel 5, Broadcast 20 January 2011).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Lee lived in Manchester but his case was not exceptional. Gardiner said that looting was the 'largely unspoken, unacknowledged underside of the "blitz spirit", the fissure that crazed the pulling together to face a common enemy – and it was widespread'.<sup>63</sup>

Had journalists examined this underside they would have noticed it was not just youths who were reacting to the war by disregarding the law but people who normally would be regarded as pillars of the society. So it was a war reserve policeman (aged 34) and a customs office watcher (46) who were convicted of stealing 12 bottles of whisky, a 30-year-old soldier who was given a three-month prison sentence for looting and a 39-year-old shop keeper charged with stealing £4 10 shillings in cash and a £20 cash register from a bombed out inn.<sup>64</sup> An Air Raid Patrol officer was gaoled for 'neglecting duty', beginning his one-month's sentence to the words of the Manchester Stipendiary Magistrate, who said: 'If you had lived under a different regime you might have been shot.'<sup>65</sup> Violent crime did not end with the violence of the bomb either and during the eight-week study period of this thesis the *Evening Chronicle* reported that two soldiers would be executed for domestic murders.<sup>66</sup> Finally, as the thesis referred to earlier, there was a report of a political execution when it was announced Charles Albert van den Kieboom, a 26-year-old Dutch clerk would hang at Pentonville Prison for spying.<sup>67</sup> He was the third spy to be executed in seven days, following Jose Waldberg and Karl Meir to the gallows. All three were found in possession of a wireless transmitter.

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<sup>63</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 324.

<sup>64</sup> 'Whisky Stolen from Docks', *Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1940, p. 2; 'Looting After Air Raid', *Manchester Guardian*, 31 December 1940, p. 10; 'Looting Charges', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 January 1941, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> 'ARP Rescue Man Gaoled for Neglecting Duty', *Manchester Evening News*, 29 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> 'Soldier's Execution Date', *Evening Chronicle*, 20 December 1940, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> 'Third Nazi Spy Executed', *Manchester Evening News*, 17 December 1940, p. 1.

#### 4. Letters to the Editor

The feedback loops that ensure there is a two-way communication between newspapers and their audience were discussed in earlier chapters, but the most overt come in the readers' letters column. These form an important part of a newspaper in that they 'enable both the press and the readership to keep an ear to the ground and listen in to some of the leading themes of local conversation'.<sup>68</sup> All readers' letters are subject to the gate-keeping of journalists, however, and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen listed four criteria by which letters are selected for publication. These are the letter's entertainment value, its brevity, the writer's authority and command of English and, finally, its relevance or news-worthiness.<sup>69</sup> All four criteria are open to the kind of journalistic judgements that have previously been considered, but the last is particularly so as readers' attempts to introduce their own items to the news agenda will 'almost invariably fail'.<sup>70</sup> With newspapers promoting the notion of unity, not many letters contradicting this theme would have been allowed in the newspaper.

Nevertheless, the *Manchester Guardian* allowed its readers to criticise both itself and the government over the suppression of the *Daily Worker*, a decision that prompted a series of letters. The *Guardian*'s editorial on the subject concluded: 'The *Daily Worker* did not believe in the war or in democracy; its only aim was to confuse and weaken. We can well spare it.'<sup>71</sup> This was a surprising position given the *Guardian*'s stance on pre-war freedoms in Nazi Germany and a majority of the letters printed on the subject condemned it. The comments included: 'It is a step which the executive of a democratic country should never take'; 'We have taken a perilous step

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<sup>68</sup> I. Jackson, *The Provincial Press and the Community* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1971), p. 174, cited in John Richardson, 'Readers' Letters' in *Pulling Newspapers Apart*, ed. by Franklin, 56-66 (p. 56).

<sup>69</sup> Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, 'Understanding the Conditions for Public Discourse: Four Rules for Selecting Letters to the Editor', *Journalism Studies*, 3:1 (2002), 69-81 (p. 73-8).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>71</sup> 'The Daily Worker', *Manchester Guardian*, 22 January 1941, p. 4.

towards the totalitarian concept of journalism'; 'Criticism has been driven underground', and 'Why use a Coalition steam-hammer to crack a Communist nut?'<sup>72</sup> Crozier was forced to defend the *Guardian's* position, stating: 'We would hold strongly that freedom to criticise the executive is as vital in time of war as it is in peace,' before adding the critical qualification 'subject to the inevitable abridgements that a virtual state of siege may impose'. This is a key point because Crozier was accepting, and transmitting to his readers, the 'necessary' role of the press in time of war. Later in his response he wrote that the suppression of the *Daily Worker* was a 'choice of evils'.<sup>73</sup>

This thesis has shown the *Manchester Guardian's* eagerness to criticise was overstated by Crozier, but the readers were less inhibited (or the censors were more willing to allow them to be). In December 1940 a letter noted that the shortage of workers in munitions and aeroplane factories had not prevented advertisements in a London newspaper requesting two footmen, at least 5ft 10in tall, for 'a noblemen's establishment' and another two footmen to join a 'large staff' in London and Windsor. This, the writer, wrote was 'deeply shocking'.<sup>74</sup> Three days later another letter condemned the sentence of 10 years handed down to two young policemen for looting. 'I read the news with feelings of horror at the severe sentence,' it read, 'and have since watched the press for some sign of charity and mercy, which I have failed to notice.'<sup>75</sup> On 30 December 1940 seven students wrote a letter about the conditions sheltering in London's tube stations. 'Do the authorities really think that 12 sanitary

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<sup>72</sup> 'The Right of Criticism', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 January 1941, p. 8; 'A Blow at Freedom of the Press', *Manchester Guardian*, 28 January 1941, p.10; 'The Right of Public Criticism', *Manchester Guardian*, 4 February 1941, p. 10; 'Some Probable Effects', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 February 1941, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> 'Risks of Stifling Criticism', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 February 1941, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> 'Service and Sahibs', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 December 1940, p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> 'Crime and Punishment', *Manchester Guardian*, 19 December 1940, p. 10.

buckets are sufficient for 2,000 people?’ they asked.<sup>76</sup> These letters point to dissatisfaction and hint at a lack of common purpose but were not followed up with any vigour by the press. This is more evidence of journalistic participation in the creation of the narrative desired by the government.

Home Intelligence reported that ‘serious, long letters’ were published only in *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *Manchester Evening News*, which comprised six pages compared to the *Guardian*’s 10, gave less space to readers’ views, averaging two a week over the study period.<sup>77</sup> There was little sense of criticism, and what there was referred to the public rather than the authorities.<sup>78</sup> No letter pertained to the Manchester Blitz until 2 January and the two published thanked a team of women voluntary helpers for their work in a rest centre and a Mr Eastwood, a greengrocer, who had given the keys of his shop to a local rector so that the homeless could have ‘the run of the shop’.<sup>79</sup> There were only hints at social divisions, the first signed by ‘Query’, who articulated the class antagonism noted elsewhere when asking of a woman who employed two maids: ‘Would she not be more patriotic if she were merely to do all her own housework and thereby release two women for whole-time national work?’ In February ‘Share Alike’ from Levenshulme (south east Manchester) wrote that he was pleased to see the *Manchester Evening News* ‘had the courage to criticise landlords who refuse to make a contribution towards the cost of long ladders to protect their own property’.<sup>80</sup> Given that the newspaper had neglected to confront the authorities over their lack of

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<sup>76</sup> ‘Shelter Conditions in Tube Stations’, *Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1940, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

<sup>78</sup> The observation of December 1940 was typical: ‘So, once more, even in time of war the mails are to be cluttered up with Christmas cards.’ (Letter’, *Manchester Evening News*, 21 December 1940, p. 2.)

<sup>79</sup> ‘Letters’, *Manchester Evening News*, 2 January 1941, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Letters’, *Manchester Evening News*, 5 February 1941, p. 2.



preparation for, and reaction to, the Blitz, it would be difficult to endorse this alleged 'courage' with evidence.

The *Evening Chronicle* also had relatively few letters and hardly any were critical. Some had an almost child-like belief in official communiqués and press propaganda, particularly a correspondent named as 'Chins Up', who wrote:

Reading that Germans living in the much bombed Rhineland and Ruhr industrial towns don't bother to go to their shelter now in RAF raids because they have learned that British pilots stick to industrial targets, and that when the warning of an RAF raid is given factory workers quit their jobs and move into residential districts for their safety, one wonders why, in the view of the *Luftwaffe's* methods, we should take such care to restrict the RAF to military targets. The only way to reply to the Nazi tactics is bombs and more bombs.<sup>81</sup>

Readers' letters are subject to the gate-keeping referred to above and there could have been other, less belligerent and believing, letters that did not make it to print. 'Chins Up' could also have been a journalist asked to push the newspaper's particular point of view by an alternative means, but a publication would rapidly lose credibility if letters were consistently too far removed from the prevailing mood. On 1 January, for example, 'Chins Up' was followed by an un-named correspondent, who wrote: 'By far the largest majority of the public are indignant that we do not serve the enemies with similar raids to those suffered by our towns and cities.'<sup>82</sup> Ten days later 'Common Sense' wrote: 'They should have the same medicine,' adding, 'we have been told the number of air raid casualties in this county. Has Germany published her figures?'<sup>83</sup> These letters pointed to a desire for retribution that Hastings claimed was a result of government propaganda:

Only a limited number of British and American people gave much thought to the fate of Germany beneath air bombardment, partly because their governments persistently deceived them about the nature of the campaign: the reality of area

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<sup>81</sup> 'Your Own Opinion...', *Evening Chronicle*, 27 December 1940, p. 2

<sup>82</sup> 'Your Own Opinion...', *Evening Chronicle*, 1 January 1941, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> 'Your Own Opinion...', *Evening Chronicle*, 11 January 1941, p. 2.

bombing, the targeting of cities, was concealed beneath verbiage about industrial installations.’<sup>84</sup>

The only hint of criticism of the local authorities in the *Evening Chronicle*’s letters column, came on 24 January when a correspondent questioned the assertion that bombed-out families had been rehoused. The correspondent said he knew of one family who had been moved in with other people ‘making a total of 10 in one house, with three small bedrooms’.<sup>85</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The above evidence suggests that newspapers allowed their readers limited scope to criticise through their letters, although it could be argued these served to add to the newspapers’ fictive ‘fourth estate’ mantle. If there had been allegations that they were too willing to voice the opinions of the powerful they could have offered this as evidence to the contrary. The attack on nameless landlords by the *Manchester Evening News*, for example, was a cheap assertion of the newspaper’s independence that would not have cost it nothing in terms of political approval or revenue but would have reinforced a notional position of independence.

Even before the war started the *Daily Mirror* was promoting a message of constancy. ‘Cheerfulness was the keynote of Britain’s people in the hours of crisis yesterday,’ it printed in August 1939. It added: ‘We’ve always come smilin’ through.’<sup>86</sup> This theme became the default position of the press, local and national, but among the wider newspaper reading public there was a more balanced reaction to the war that included less positive expressions than smiles. People managed because there was no alternative. London was bombed heavily first and the ‘Cheerful

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<sup>84</sup> Hastings, *All Hell*, p. 493.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Your Own Opinion...’, *Evening Chronicle*, 24 January 1941, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Britain Smiles and Prepares’, *Daily Mirror*, 25 August 1939, pp. 16-17.

Cockney', precisely because this fiction was established by the press *ab initio*, became the template by which the populations in other cities would judge themselves. The hegemonic success of newspapers in persuading readers of this desired perspective was revealed when Home Intelligence, a government monitor of the public's mood, reported that people outside London had an exaggerated impression of the damage being inflicted on the capital but believed that 'if London can take it, so can we'.<sup>87</sup>

With such a determined effort to emphasise and even manufacture good news, it is not a surprise that no newspaper properly examined social tensions or the drift towards lawlessness by a significant number of people bombed out of their normal patterns of behaviour. While it would be overstating the case to say there was large-scale opposition to the war, the country had suffered deep divisions in the 1930s and it would have been remarkable if these merely evaporated under the threat of invasion. This chapter has shown that crime was reported and statistics published but the link between the effects of the war and criminal activity was never established. Crime rose, industrial relations were strained and social tension grew. The Blitz exposed shortcomings at local level that, in Manchester's case, will be examined in the next chapter, and the host of regulations that encouraged many to disobey or disregard. There were alternative views, but, an occasional letter to the editor apart, they were neglected by the newspapers. Marie Price, from Liverpool, remembered an atmosphere that differed from what she read on the press and saw in the newsreels:

Churchill was telling us how brave we all were and that we would never surrender. I tell you something – the people of Liverpool would have surrendered overnight if they could have. It's all right for people in authority, down in their steel-lined dugouts, but we were there and it was just too awful.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Mass Observation, Box 1, *Propaganda*, 18 September 1940.

<sup>88</sup> Levine, *Forgotten Voices* p. 412.

Circulations rose between 1939 and 1945 but so did the disillusionment with newspapers and, despite the bombing, surveys indicated that the lack of interest in the war rose from 10 per cent in spring 1940 to nearly a third by the end of that year.<sup>89</sup> Curran and Seaton summed up the mood in the civilian ranks not so much as all in this together as ‘us’ against ‘them’: ‘The opposition was as much to the unbelievable bureaucracy of British administration as to the Nazis themselves.’<sup>90</sup> This harked back to pre-war social tensions and, as a consequence, Britons displayed a complex set of attitudes that did not merely reflect the homogeneous and monolithic approval of the government and the war. Instead, the general reluctant assent to the conflict was sublimated into criticisms of the rich, the press and politicians, only a small amount of which was given a platform in Britain’s newspapers.

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<sup>89</sup> Ponting, *1940*, p. 171.

<sup>90</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 126.

## Chapter 8

### Manchester in the Aftermath of the Blitz

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter will use extracts compiled from the Mass Observation and Home Intelligence Archive at the University of Sussex to show that the contemporary opinions expressed in 1940 and 1941 often were at odds to what was being reported in national and local newspapers. The evidence points to people being scared, depressed and openly discussing whether the suffering brought on by the Second World War was worth it, sentiments never confronted by the press.

The above records were first compiled to provide evidence for the government to test the national mood between 1939 and 1945, but the Manchester focus of this thesis means most emphasis will be placed on reports from or about the city. Particular attention will be applied to the communiqués of a lorry driver who reported from four miles outside the centre and who demonstrated that at times morale in Manchester deviated considerably from the official portrayal. His lengthy and detailed dispatches also hint at changes in behaviour that may have been the symptoms of stress.<sup>1</sup>

He noted that the collapse in morale was most obvious in the immediate aftermath of the Manchester Blitz, which endorsed another Home Intelligence report that looked at public opinion in Manchester in January 1941, a matter of days after its principal bombing.<sup>2</sup> As previous chapters have shown, no hint of the mood of Mancunian despair appeared in the press and these optimistic news columns, ironically, were blamed by the official report for making matters even worse in the

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<sup>1</sup> Mass Observation, FR 620.

<sup>2</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

city. The chapter will also examine the recollections of people caught in the Manchester Blitz stored in Stockport Library.

## 2. Mass Observation

The initial impetus behind the launch of Mass Observation was provided by the Abdication Crisis in 1936. Three men, ornithologist and anthropologist Tom Harrisson, poet and *Daily Mirror* journalist Charles Madge, and film-maker Humphrey Jennings, were disappointed by the perceptions of public opinion being reported in the press and decided to collect more reliable data.<sup>3</sup> Their ambition was to construct ‘an anthropology of ourselves’ and monitor the effect of society on individuals.<sup>4</sup> This was provided by volunteers, who maintained diaries or answered questionnaires, and by paid investigators, who anonymously recorded conversations and monitored behaviour at work and on the streets. The subjects of the reports and the correspondents were not in positions of power, and, beyond their immediate family and local communities, had little influence. As one of Mass Observation’s leaflets put it:

Intellectuals find it hard to express themselves [but] observation comes naturally to people who are living in the thick of work-a-day existence. Among our best Observers are a mechanic, a coalminer, a waiter, a clerk, a housewife (middle class) and a housewife (working class).<sup>5</sup>

Looking from the context of the twenty-first century, this comes across as patronising, and it would be pertinent to question the criteria used to define middle and working class, but a modern perspective is not required to find voices for and

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<sup>3</sup> Penny Summerfield ‘Mass Observation: Social Research or Social Movement’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, 3 (1985), 439-52 (p. 440); Benjamin Jones, ‘Mass Observation 75 Years On: the Extraordinary in the Everyday’ (*Guardian*, 2012) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/apr/19/mass-observation-75-years>> [accessed 1 April 2013].

<sup>4</sup> Garfield, *We Are at War*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

against the project. Mass Observation also had its contemporary supporters and critics, some claiming it heralded a new form of social research while others complained it was simply snooping. Turner noted:

Evelyn Waugh complained of ‘pseudoscientific showmanship’. During World War Two a minute by an official in the Ministry of Home Security described Mass Observation reports on Blitz morale as ‘a most extraordinary mixture of fact, fiction and dangerous mischief’ emanating apparently from ‘the intelligentsia’.<sup>6</sup>

The sense of intrusion was reinforced when the Ministry of Information created the Home Intelligence unit at the outset of the Second World War, commandeering the Mass Observation reports and investigations by the Wartime Social Survey, an organisation established in April 1940 to investigate questions of sociological importance.<sup>7</sup> These became part of a network of sources supplemented by Home Intelligence’s regional officers, who compiled material from shopkeepers, publicans, clergymen, shop stewards and others who regularly came into contact with the public.

On the Channel 5 Dr Jeremy Crang of Edinburgh University said:

Little did the people of Britain know that the government was secretly opening their letters and listening into their telephone conversations and, what I find most surprising, is that GPs were monitoring attitudes of their patients and reporting these to Home Intelligence. This was in effect the British government eavesdropping on the British people.<sup>8</sup>

Some on the political left felt they were being singled out for attention and on the same programme Bill Grave, a trade unionist during the war, expressed his anger:

Those that knew were incensed. They said we are fighting a war for freedom and this stupidity is going on... It was the working class were being picked on by these snobby people, from public schools. They picked on the little people and it was resented, very much so.<sup>9</sup>

If the reception was mixed, so was the reaction of the contributors. Some correspondents feared that, in a climate where people were being fined or threatened

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<sup>6</sup> E. S. Turner, ‘Snooping’, *London Review of Books*, 3,18 (1981), pp. 23-24.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Box and Geoffrey Thomas, ‘The Wartime Social Survey’, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 107 (1944), 151-189 (p. 151).

<sup>8</sup> *Secrets of the Blitz* (Channel 5).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

with prison for despondency, they might be laying themselves open to prosecution. For example, Christopher Tomlin, a writing paper salesman from Fulwood in Preston, wrote in July 1940: 'I must confess I'm nervous of this diary being in authorities' [sic] hands. It might get me a year or at least six months.'<sup>10</sup> Six months earlier, however, Tomlin had explained the appeal:

The reason why I am keen on Mass Observation is because it wants to know and inform, tell all classes about the emotions, acts, thoughts and struggles of the ordinary or 'average' man and woman. Too many articles and books are on high-flown subjects, there are none about the prosaic things or everyday.<sup>11</sup>

Starting in Bolton, Lancashire, the first event that Mass Observation monitored was the coronation of George VI on 12 May 1937 when 12 observers were asked to move around during the day 'noting down what they saw and heard'.<sup>12</sup> The scope and the reach of the reports soon spread, however, so that the whole of Britain was covered when the Second World War began in 1939, although its claims that it had 2,000 amateur observers were ingenuous. Calder and Sheridan stated that, excluding one-off replies, only 1,095 people joined the reporting panel between 1939 and 1945 and that very few of those did so without a break.<sup>13</sup> More typically, between 200 and 500 were reporting regularly so that the figure of 400 who replied to a questionnaire on 'class' in the summer of 1939 was not abnormal. Women accounted for a third of these respondents, another third was made up of unmarried men aged under 25, and 60 per cent of the total were aged under 35.<sup>14</sup> Calder and Sheridan wrote:

The 'typical' male Mass Observer was a young clerk or student, the 'typical' female was a teacher or middle-class housewife. Unrepresentative of Britain's population as to age and sex, the Panel was also 'skewed' geographically, with a very heavy bias towards the South-East of England. Does this mean that the Panel

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<sup>10</sup> Mass Observation, cited in Garfield, *We Are at War*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Summerfield, 'Mass Observation', p. 440.

<sup>13</sup> Calder and Sheridan, *Speak for Yourself*, p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74.



was sociologically worthless? Certainly not. It gave... access to the private opinions of hundreds of people.<sup>15</sup>

The government allied the Mass Observation reports to those being compiled by Mary Adams and Home Intelligence to monitor the mood of a population under fire. Initially, the government was reluctant to use Mass Observation, some detractors charging its members as being ‘a bunch of dangerous pinkos’, and there was a preference for using the Secret Service instead.<sup>16</sup> Adams argued, however, that Mass Observation was more in touch with people’s feelings than any official, writing:

The results of Mass Observation are, not unnaturally, critical of certain social happenings and I do not think that criticism is subversive. The use to which criticisms may be put may lead to subversive actions. But it is our business to acquaint ourselves with criticisms and direct the attention of those in authority to the causes of discontent.<sup>17</sup>

The private opinions expressed in Mass Observation’s reports showed that, contrary to the approved image, many were close to breaking point, something Harrison confirmed in a report in the *British Medical Journal* in April 1941. In it he acknowledged he was a biologist rather than a doctor, but nevertheless he felt that the reports of low degrees of nervousness were faulty. There was evidence, he wrote, that people had left the bombed areas, found a refuge, ‘and then caved in’. The report continued:

In some cases they have simply taken to bed and stayed in bed for weeks at a time. They have not shown the marked trembling of hysteria, but an extreme desire to retreat into sleep and be looked after, as if chronically ill. We have found such cases mainly among women but also among men and children.<sup>18</sup>

One of Harrison’s Mass Observation reporters, LE in Streatham, south London, reported in January 1941 that morale was ‘lower than ever before’ and that there was

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 169.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *British Medical Journal*, 12 April 1941, cited in Gardiner, *The Blitz*, pp. 190-91.

a strong feeling of 'how futile it all is'.<sup>19</sup> L. E. added: 'This for the most part has not developed into a Stop-the-War feeling, though one local rumour (unfounded as far as inv [investigator] can see) reports a Stop-the-War meeting in a local road.'<sup>20</sup> This wholly contradicted the newspapers, *The Times* being typical. On the same day it reported that the Minister for Labour Ernest Bevin had told the Transport and General Workers Union: 'I sincerely trust that this year will bring us victory.'<sup>21</sup> The tone could hardly have been more different. L. E. also recorded a 'typical' conversation: 'I don't think I can stand it if it goes on much longer like this, night after night, coming down all around us. I must go away.'<sup>22</sup> Kathleen Box's report of a conversation in Fulham at the height of the London Blitz on 14 October 1940 was also pessimistic: 'Sleep! You can't sleep. We can't go on like this can we? It can't go on... They'll have to do something about it soon or there'll be a revolution.'<sup>23</sup>

The newspapers did not print these cries of helplessness or mutinous belligerence, but Home Intelligence did report on the newspapers. Earlier it was noted that a survey in May 1940 reported that distrust in the press had increased and a year later Stephen Taylor, in an appendix to a regular Home Intelligence report, *Home Morale and Public Opinion*, wrote that Fleet Street exercised considerable influence when it came to foreign news 'as the public as a whole has no means of cross checking', but at home it was less powerful.<sup>24</sup> 'The public often makes up its mind on its own experience before the press knows anything about it.' Taylor added:

So far the most calamitous events have been turned to mental profit by the British public. Thus, the collapse of France was treated along these lines:— 'At last, we're on our own and there's no-one else to let us down; now we've really got to get on

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<sup>19</sup> Many correspondents preferred to use initials rather than their full names; Mass Observation, Box 1, *Propaganda*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> 'Mr Bevin on the Work of Reconstruction', *Times*, 14 January 1941, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Mass Observation, Box 1 *Propaganda*.

<sup>23</sup> Calder and Sheridan, *Speak for Yourself*, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126; Mass Observation, Box 1 *Propaganda*, 1 October 1941.

with the job.' Again, the Blitz was converted from a thing of terror to a symbol of pride and toughness. 'Our Blitz was worse than yours – and look at us.'<sup>25</sup>

Taylor drew a distinction between the national and local press, regarding the latter as a more reliable indicator, and creator, of public opinion. The reporters, he argued, came from the community and therefore were more aware of the pulse beating in the surrounding streets, and that the newspapers could devote a greater share of its space to local happenings and news, which influenced opinion.<sup>26</sup> Taylor's perception of the local press was generous. Haley, the editor of the *Manchester Evening News*, wrote about his journey to work in the post-Blitz city in his diary on 29 December 1940: 'For four days afterwards one walked through a line of soldiers with drawn bayonets down Piccadilly.'<sup>27</sup> That alarming entry not only evokes a striking visual image at odds with the propaganda of the time but also implied that the troops were there to prevent lawlessness breaking out in the bombed out centre of Manchester. Not a word, or even a hint, of this appeared in Haley's newspaper and nor did it appear in other local or national newspapers.

While L. E. and Kathleen Box were writing diary entries in or close to the capital, Bill Naughton was compiling reports for Mass Observation from Manchester. Not to be confused with the Bolton-born playwright of the same name who also reported from London for Mass Observation in the war, Naughton was described as a 'very intelligent lorry driver' by an anonymous official.<sup>28</sup> He lived on Wilbraham Road, Fallowfield, four miles south east of the city centre, and wrote of a 'Blitz complex' in January 1941 in the days after the Manchester bombings that was exposed by absenteeism from work. He reported that his own firm, a distributor of fruit and vegetables, was operating at 20 per cent of the pre-Blitz norm, partly

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<sup>25</sup> Mass Observation, Box 1 *Propaganda*, 1 October 1941.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Churchill Archives, Haley, 29 December 1940.

<sup>28</sup> Mass Observation, FR 839.

because of the bomb damage that disrupted transport but mainly because of the attitudes of the employees.<sup>29</sup> He reported that ‘sharp extremes of mental and moral feelings were manifest’ and followed geographical lines.<sup>30</sup> Those who lived outside Manchester were philosophical about the damage to their city centre, those whose homes were closer to the Blitzed areas were near to total dejection. Naughton reported: ‘In the bombed areas where homes, personal belongings and relatives were lost, the morale was shockingly low. I visited three rest centres... the misery and despair of the people were past description.’<sup>31</sup> This evidence of contrasting moods set by the geographical proximity to the bombing coincided with the response of the *Manchester Evening News* editor, Haley, who, 13 miles away in Disley, Derbyshire, reacted in wonder as well as horror to the first night of bombing. Haley wrote in his diary:

The whole Manchester part of the horizon was amazingly lit up by hundreds of flares. It was so remarkable a sight that we took all the children up to our bedroom to see it, then hurried them back to shelter.<sup>32</sup>

Compare Naughton’s observations with what was appearing in the local newspapers – The *Evening Chronicle* reported on 27 December 1940: ‘Manchester is rapidly assuming its normal workday aspect after the Blitz. Its countenance may be scarred and in some parts battered, but the people, after the Christmas respite, returned to work with determination.’ – and there was little wonder that the public began to lose faith in what they were reading.<sup>33</sup> Two months later, on 19 March, Naughton recorded conversations in Manchester about the bombing of Merseyside and Clydeside:

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<sup>29</sup> Mass Observation, FR 620.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Churchill Archives, Haley, 29 December 1940.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Manchester Gets Down to Work Behind Boards’, *Evening Chronicle*, 27 December 1940, p. 1.

People were shocked by the high death toll. I repeatedly heard the expressions: 'It's not war, just wholesale murder', 'it can't go on long this sort of thing, there's going to be nothing left fighting for', 'if they admit 500 dead you can bet it's nearer 5,000'.<sup>34</sup>

In his Manchester Industrial Survey, Naughton gave an insight into how he and other Mass Observation reporters gathered their information. On a week's holiday in 1941 he moved to parts of Manchester and the North where he was unknown and had to earn the trust of the locals:

If one spoke different; wore better or unusual clothes; was alone; a stranger; or kept silent (this instantly creates a 'taking it all in' impression) or even asked for a Worthington Bass or glass of whisky, instead of a mild, then somebody became suspicious... In Manchester it is necessary to display a facile use of the only two swearing adjectives, and it was my correct use of 'Fuckin' and 'Bleedin' that gave me the hospitality of the conversation in the somewhat esoteric locals. In transport cafes and works canteens, I always wore a greasy boiler suit and grubby hands...I never ask a question, but often start an argument.<sup>35</sup>

His report also gave an insight into how behaviour was changing in the war-time conditions. More beer, Guinness in particular, he reported, was being consumed and quoted one licensee as saying: 'I sell more beer in a dinner hour in one day than I used to do in a week.'<sup>36</sup> Moral and personal values, too, may have been affected by the potential of imminent death and Naughton wrote that munitions factories had a 'bad name' in the North for illicit intercourse during night shifts. 'Most girls are ashamed of admitting they work at Risley or Euxton munition factories.'<sup>37</sup> It is not possible to corroborate these claims, the drinking might be an exaggeration and the latter mere gossip, though both are indicators of stress and symptoms of suffering that went unreported in the press.<sup>38</sup> Hylton wrote:

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<sup>34</sup> Mass Observation, FR 620.

<sup>35</sup> Mass Observation, FR 839.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Goodman has suggested that the process of sexual harassment reinforced the power and authority of men and that women were constructed as sexually available whether or not they were. (Phil Goodman, "'Patriotic Femininity': Women's Morals and Men's Morale During the Second World War', *Gender and History*, 10, 2 (1998), 278-93 (p. 284).)

The relationship between warfare and heightened sexual activity had been understood long before the Second World War. In his 1917 work *Reflections on War and Death*, Sigmund Freud talked of ‘war aphrodisia’ – the link between violence and eroticism. Originally it applied only to those in the armed forces who were directly involved in conflict, but the age of total war brought soldier and civilian alike into the front line... The sense of living for today, lest there were no tomorrow, found its way equally into the civilian population.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. Home Intelligence’s Report on Manchester and Liverpool

The bombings of Liverpool and Manchester in the pre-Christmas period of 1940 provoked a quick reaction from a government anxious to monitor morale in Blitzed cities. Liverpool was visited by four Home Intelligence observers in late December and three of that quartet began working in Manchester on 4 January. The inspectors reported that they received an ‘exceptional degree of other voluntary observational help’ from Manchester’s social workers who were described as ‘high quality’ but whose services were ‘practically unused and completely uncoordinated in relation to Blitz problems’.<sup>40</sup> The contrast between Liverpool and Manchester hit the inspectors immediately. ‘MORALE IN LIVERPOOL IS APPRECIABLY HIGHER THAN in any other Blitzed town,’<sup>41</sup> its report announced (the capitals the observers’ own). It was a cheerfulness that Manchester could not match. The observers reported:

Going from Liverpool to Manchester was like going from an atmosphere of reasonable cheerfulness into an atmosphere of barely restrained depression. Directly investigators got into the town, only an hour away from Liverpool by road, they felt themselves back in the Blitzed town atmosphere with which they had grown familiar in the south.<sup>42</sup>

This clearly contradicted what was appearing in the newspapers, but also revealed that other Blitzed towns and cities had also suffered sharp, and unreported, drops in morale. It was not just Mancunian newspapers that failed to adhere to normal news values; the neglect extended to the whole of England. The good mood on Merseyside,

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<sup>39</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p. 115.

<sup>40</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

the Home Intelligence report noted, showed itself in many ways, the most obvious being the bustling night life and the large amount of singing and whistling in the streets, the most popular tune being 'Bless 'Em All'. Liverpool's young, those aged under 20, were described as the most cheerful, while the most gloomy were the upper and middle classes, who had most to lose. The knock-on effect of that, the report noted, was a shortfall in the Women's Voluntary Service, typically staffed by females from the top end of society, upon which rest centres and other emergency services largely relied. The reasons for this generally good morale on Merseyside were cited as a toughness derived from the harsh economic climate of the 1930s and the city's strong religious background, particularly Roman Catholicism. If people were down, they could visit vicars and priests to find solace. The report noted that only one section of Liverpool's population came in for sustained criticism: the dock workers, who were believed to be evading work and exploiting overtime rates. Given that the dockers comprised 11 per cent of the city's workforce, this was a matter that required 'action and propaganda'.<sup>43</sup> The report added:

Undoubtedly, a considerable proportion of dockers are showing very little interest in winning the war or working hard to win it. It should seem that there are numerous ways in which the optimum transport of goods from the ship to the consumer are delayed.<sup>44</sup>

If the report on Liverpool singled out one profession and the upper echelons of the city's society, Home Intelligence stated that Manchester's gloom spread to all classes and all sets of workers. Taking the point-by-point analysis it had also applied to Liverpool, it noted that the city was plagued by rumour and that there was 'constant talk about air raids'. The full point-by-point list of symptoms of Manchester's poor morale read:

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

- I. Plenty of rumour including Haw-Haw rumours, which were common. Some of these rumours are very alarmist, eg. That a female parachutist had landed dressed as a nurse and was now working in one of the hospitals.
- II. Consistent talk about air-raids and endless discussion of air-raid damage.
- III. Visible alarm when sirens sounded, people running, hurrying out of pubs and dance halls, etc.
- IV. Much staring at burnt-out buildings, etc.
- V. Practically no singing or whistling in the streets
- VI. Night transport difficulties, and no taxis after an alert. Many clubs closing at 7 pm, film show failing to come off when advertised, despite absence of raid. Open pubs only doing a quarter usual business. Only one dance hall open anywhere central, and that containing 60 people as compared with 500 in a similar hall in Liverpool.
- VII. No night entertainment.
- VIII. Little laughter and joking in the streets, much silence, and at night great silence. Overheards on Ypres, peace, rottenness of war etc.
- IX. Dance halls nearly empty – see above.
- X. Higher degree of gasmask carrying.
- XI. Considerable evacuation, though still large number of children left. Reported to be a very serious increase in juvenile crime.<sup>45</sup>

The report did acknowledge that plenty of Mancunians were ‘determined and courageous’ but talks with the city’s senior sociologists and social workers also pointed to ‘a considerable private opinion of real depression and despair’.<sup>46</sup> It added: ‘Manchester people are definitely on edge, are afraid of the next raid, are beginning really to worry about the future with a feeling of crime semi-despair [sic]. All this is under the surface.’<sup>47</sup> The report said that this could be remedied by adequate leadership and encouragement but could find little of either, commenting that the ‘atrophy of local leadership’ caused by the war-time relationship between local and central government led to a weakening of the ‘solidarity of the bigger cities’.<sup>48</sup> This was not reported by local or national newspapers.

As this thesis noted earlier, Home Intelligence’s reporters speculated on why Manchester had not reacted in a similar manner to Liverpool, quoting ‘selfishness’

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



and ‘softness’.<sup>49</sup> This did not put Manchester in a favourable light, but the report did concede that, paradoxically, Liverpool benefitted from being raided more frequently:

A steady stream of small raids actually helps many people to overcome their anxieties and make their adjustments. Then, when a big raid does come, it is only a bigger raid than the previous ones. But a big raid on a town which is mentally unprepared, which is not in training for the Blitz, is a knockout drop. In Manchester, Coventry and Southampton, there has been no such conditioning.<sup>50</sup>

This lack of conditioning was exacerbated because the pre-Christmas raids were concentrated mainly on the city centres of Manchester and Salford as well as Trafford Park, which had a profound effect on the area’s infrastructure. Transport was more severely damaged than in Liverpool and led to a virtual close-down of the city’s hub. ‘The importance of transport in keeping up morale cannot be overemphasised,’ the Home Intelligence inspectors noted.<sup>51</sup> The observers also reported that the timing of the raids, just before Christmas, ‘gave a tragic bitterness to the whole affair’ and was unfortunate because many of the voluntary helpers who staffed the rest centres had taken time off for the festivities.<sup>52</sup> After the bombing, those volunteers often had no means of getting back into the city centre. The holiday period also meant that there were no newspapers on 25 and 26 December, a period, the report noted, when ‘the local press can do so much to rally morale’.<sup>53</sup>

The report went on to criticise the local and national press, accusing it of exacerbating the problems by creating a false impression of steadfastness and optimism. This journalism jarred in the stricken circumstances of January 1941, but also amounted to a failure to adhere to one of the principal functions of newspapers

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

articulated by Curran: scrutinising government.<sup>54</sup> The report accused Manchester of ‘over-complacency’, pointing its fingers at the ‘upper classes’ but in particular those responsible for preparing for Blitzed conditions. It highlighted several deficiencies, including a breakdown in information that led to ‘extraordinary confusions and unnecessary hardships’.<sup>55</sup> As a consequence, 90 per cent of bomb victims failed to apply for help that they should have received from the Assistance Board and, when the Lord Mayor of Manchester announced another aid scheme, only four people applied in the first two days.<sup>56</sup> The chief problem, however, was bad organisation on a widespread basis. The report noted that actions taken in the first 36 hours after a raid had beneficial effects on morale, but rest centres in Manchester were ‘unsatisfactory and unprepared’.<sup>57</sup>

One of the self-proclaimed main functions of the press is to hold authority to account and no Manchester newspaper reported these deficiencies and they also ignored what conventional news values would regard as an even stronger news story: that the city’s lack of preparation was a direct result of the interference of Manchester City Council. The city had been unprepared, according to the Home Intelligence inspectors, partly because the local authority had attacked the city’s emergency committee, which had led to the resignation of the chairman and other changes in personnel. When Manchester was bombed the new committee had been in place just a few weeks and the lack of experience was telling. The report read:

The delay in taking elementary measures, such as the provision of rest centres with bedding and beds, seems incredible to the observer of London or Coventry. It is connected, of course, with the general morale of Manchester before the Blitz,

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<sup>54</sup> James Curran, ‘Press Reformism 1918-98: A Study of Failure’, in *Media Power, Professionals and Policies*, ed. by H. Tumber (London: Routledge, 2000), 35-55 (p. 35).

<sup>55</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

which infected all groups; with a particularly striking lack of co-ordination, and several notorious local jealousies.<sup>58</sup>

The report also quoted several examples of incompetence, stating: 'Many cases of errors of judgement and inefficiency which could not be tolerated in a tank or battleship, were revealed.'<sup>59</sup> An example included the largest rest centre running out of registration forms for rehousing on the first morning after the Blitz. Manchester Town Hall could provide only five more of these forms when 1,000 people were in this main centre. 'The consequence of this trivial omission, which impacts on hundreds of homeless families, adds up in terms of morale to an influence on many thousands of people.'<sup>60</sup>

Manchester newspapers might have wished to gloss over or ignore 'local jealousies' because highlighting them would have been seen as an attack on its target audience, but failing to pursue incidences of local authority incompetence contradicted a basic tenet of news reporting, the public watchdog.<sup>61</sup> By comparison, newspapers in Manchester and elsewhere in Britain quickly asked questions about the adequacy of the fire warden system, that was the duty of private firms to provide and could save buildings hit by incendiary bombs, yet ignored the other manifest inadequacies of local and central government. Whether this was fuelled by patriotism or fear, the consequence was a widespread mistrust of the media. So great was this that in 1941 the Home Intelligence inspectors were moved to criticise the local and national media, including the BBC, whose news bulletins on the Manchester Blitz were described as 'clumsy' and providing an impetus to the darker rumours sweeping the city. The report added:

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Curran, 'Press Reformism', p. 35; Randall, *Universal Journalist*, p. 22; Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*, p. 3.

There was violent feeling among the middle class and others about the way the Manchester raids were handled on the news, and Manchester felt that they ought to have been given much more praise and much more emphasis. This is really a point which has not been sufficiently considered; how far do the morale effects of Blitz censorship outweigh the military necessities of suppression?<sup>62</sup>

Later chapters will show that newspapers, even those based and printed in Manchester, moved on to other news items within days of the city's bombing, but the report noted that even what was printed could have had a negative effect. The Home Intelligence observers agreed that they had dwelt on the 'darker side of the picture' but were unapologetic because the authorities had adopted an attitude of complacency and 'we put up a fine show' while the local and national press painted a happy picture. Individual mention was made of the *Manchester Guardian*, which, as this thesis stated earlier, reported that every rest centre had its turkey as part of the Christmas Day celebrations. The observers wrote:

Had there been turkey for everyone in the rest centres, and a turkey atmosphere in Manchester on Christmas day, the morale of this town might have been in a much better condition to face any trials which may lie ahead.<sup>63</sup>

The rest centres were a persistent concern for the inspectors. Quoting another report, written by an 'expert' social worker, it was noted that people arrived in Manchester's 'show' centre at 11 pm on Sunday, 22 December 1941, and did not receive their first cup of tea until more than 12 hours later, at 11.30 am. Bread and jam was the lunch and dinner arrived at 5 pm on 23 December but consisted of only potatoes and gravy. 'Tea was expected in the evening but never came.'<sup>64</sup> The report conceded that the meals improved but 'ran out' prematurely; noted that there were no cooking facilities 'not even a primus stove'; and that milk was provided for babies but there was no distribution of milk to children even though there was surplus caused by

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<sup>62</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

people who had fled the city.<sup>65</sup> The inspectors wrote that there were no medical services in the centres, adding:

Old and infirm people suffering from shock, cripples and blind people, had to sit all night in the crowded hall. There was no-one to look after them, and it was difficult for even an able person to pick his way in and out of the room. The lavatories were up steps, which were very dark.<sup>66</sup>

The report also commented on a lack of bathing facilities – many people did not have a bath for a week – room cleaning and ventilation, the last of which was pointed out to a representative of the local Welfare Department, who replied: ‘This is a rest centre, not the Ritz.’<sup>67</sup>

The report’s conclusion listed 13 reasons why Manchester’s morale had suffered more than Liverpool’s. It noted the latter had a ‘general conditioning of toughness’ and that the former exhibited an ‘astonishing lack of real preparation’ and a failure to co-ordinate and harness ‘all the available resources of good will and social consciousness’.<sup>68</sup> Its final reason was the most damning: ‘A major factor in Manchester was the lack of mental preparation, which was surely the responsibility of local leadership and central authority.’<sup>69</sup> A local reporter in different circumstances would have noted that Manchester was singled out because this mental preparedness was ‘undoubtedly operating, often subtly, in many other towns’.<sup>70</sup>

In a subsequent report, written for Home Intelligence by one of the founders of Mass Observation, Harrison, reported that the raids on Manchester had definitely weakened the morale of the people.<sup>71</sup> His main target was not the local authorities, however, but the press and what he described as its ‘superficial observations’,

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Mass Observation, FR 568.

underlining that the Manchester press was more culpable than most in the creation of myth. He added: 'Journalists, who are not of the working classes and who have little economic or personal experience of the masses, have produced a picture of complete courage, determination, carry-onism [sic]; a vast press propaganda of "everything is OK with civilians"'.<sup>72</sup> The effect of this reporting, he wrote, was that it made it 'practically disloyal to suggest that morale is not perfect' and that the 'rosy atmosphere of 100 per cent morale' had been so pronounced that Home Intelligence inspectors had begun to doubt their findings about weak morale in Manchester, Portsmouth and Bristol. He added: 'Confidence in news and official statements, which are vital in keeping morale steady and people wide awake, has strikingly declined.'<sup>73</sup>

#### 4. Contemporary Reaction

The Home Intelligence report on morale in Manchester and Liverpool concluded with an appendix, a subjective account from a Mass Observation diarist, Rita Maloney, a 20-year-old female clerical worker in Manchester whose husband was a soldier serving overseas.<sup>74</sup> She wrote that the attack on the city had been unexpected because people had come to believe that the *Luftwaffe* merely passed over Manchester on the way to Liverpool. Such was the complacency that she and most of her neighbours had abandoned going to shelters when the sirens sounded.<sup>75</sup> This lack of real concern continued through the two nights (Sunday and Monday) of the Manchester Blitz until she had to walk to work. She wrote:

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

I must have been foolish to imagine after such a raid that I would be able to catch a bus as usual. The few that were running were full long before they came in sight, and the trams were not running at all.<sup>76</sup>

She noticed the reluctance of drivers to give bus-less commuters a lift. 'I was appalled by the lack of co-operation from car drivers,' she reported, contradicting the *Manchester Evening News*'s cheerful assertion that motorists 'entered into the spirit of the free "lifts" scheme this morning'.<sup>77</sup> Mrs Maloney added:

There were hundreds of us all walking over pavements littered with broken glass from the broken shop windows on either side of the road. It was curious that we saw these broken windows for a mile, but no sign of any other damage.<sup>78</sup>

It was not until she cycled to work the following day to find Piccadilly, one of Manchester's main squares, cordoned off and saw local landmarks on fire, that the full impact of the bombing hit her. She wrote:

I didn't realise the sight would affect me so much that I was near to tears. We were all quiet at work, shaken by the sight of so much damage... None of us worked again, and early in the afternoon we were paid and sent home... I was glad to get away from town.<sup>79</sup>

She went on to articulate the despair harboured by many of her fellow Mancunians, and the anger and distrust directed at the media:

You will hear a lot of talk of Manchester carrying on. I suppose we are, as well as any other town at any rate, but as one who lives here, it's a rather weary carrying on. When we heard the BBC's summing up of our Blitz, making it sound rather like a village which had had a stick of bombs dropped on it, along with many others, we wondered how true the reports on Coventry and Liverpool were, and all the other towns. We are carrying on and 'taking it' because we've got to, but we aren't very happy about it.<sup>80</sup>

On 27 December 1940, the *Evening Chronicle* had reported that Manchester 'may be scarred and in some parts battered, but the people, after the Christmas respite,

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> 'Buildings Dynamited in Lancashire Town', *Manchester Evening News*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

returned to work with determination.’<sup>81</sup> Weary, untrusting and unhappy would have been a more accurate description.

Other Mass Observation diaries underlined the sense of destruction and helplessness in the city. G. W. Shipway, a Mancunian railway draughtsman, referred to earlier in relation to the League of Nations, wrote: ‘On reaching Piccadilly a terrible scene confronted me – streets of burning buildings. Water was being played on some, but it seemed hopeless.’<sup>82</sup> Later he wrote that soldiers had cordoned off a half-mile zone and, even on Christmas Day, he noted that ‘soldiers were much in evidence’.<sup>83</sup> Another diarist, Mrs M. Woodside from Northern Ireland, recorded that an acquaintance had just returned from bombed Manchester. She reported that the blackout was a ‘farce’, stating that the *Luftwaffe* released incendiary bombs until the city was lit up and then proceeded ‘to pick their targets with HE [high explosive] bombs practically unhindered’.<sup>84</sup>

Even 18 months later the city had not recovered, a story at odds with what was being reported in Manchester’s newspapers. Mr G. F. Sedgwick, from Glasgow, visited Manchester on holiday for a fortnight on 29 July 1942 and described what greeted him as ‘depressing’. He wrote that he did not want to be over-sentimental, but added: ‘It was heartrending to see the smashed shells of such notable buildings as the Royal Exchange, the Free Trade Hall and the Central Hall.’<sup>85</sup> His greatest impression was the general deterioration of the city, writing:

It had been going down hill for some time and strenuous efforts [are] required to be made to eradicate the mess which industrialism had made of the place in the nineteenth century. Proposals were on hand to rebuild the derelict belt of slums...around the city but progress has been sadly interfered with by the war and the place looks a ruin. I have never, for instance, seen so many empty shops and

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<sup>81</sup> ‘Manchester Gets Down to Work Behind Boards’, *Evening Chronicle*, 27 December 1940, p. 1

<sup>82</sup> Mass Observation, D5199, Shipway, 17 January 1941.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Mass Observation, D5462, M. Woodside, 2 January 1941.

<sup>85</sup> Mass Observation, D5196, G. F. Sedgwick, September 1942.



dilapidated buildings. Why private shops should have gone out of business in Manchester and not in Glasgow is impossible for me to explain.<sup>86</sup>

## 5. Looking back on Manchester's Blitz

The reports from Mass Observation and Home Intelligence on the Manchester Blitz were contemporary, or recorded soon afterwards. There were later accounts, including books referred to earlier, many of which were published after the myth had been fixed as how things really were. Read, a schoolboy in Manchester in the Blitz, was among them:

Although, according to the Mass Observation reports, morale in parts of Manchester was very low after the December raids, in Burnage I never heard any complaints from my parents or at school. The Fairey Aviation works were only half-a-mile from our house, where warplanes were made, so we accepted that we were in a target area. Perhaps this even raised our morale subconsciously, letting us feel that we were more than simply a target for indiscriminate bombing, the we were on the front line, and in the phrase of the time, we could 'take it'.<sup>87</sup>

Read's predominantly defiant memory was not universally shared. Henry Abraham from Salford wrote: 'It was really frightening, and anyone who said he was not frightened was lying.'<sup>88</sup> Brenda Lees, who lived in Old Trafford, two miles south-west of the city centre, wrote a letter to her husband describing a scene of chaos in the immediate aftermath of the Manchester Blitz, with no gas, electricity or a wireless to let her family know what was happening. 'Many a time we thought the house was caving in on us... We were cramped in the cellar for 12 hours, with our limbs trembling with fright.'<sup>89</sup> Kathleen Fox (nee Shell), a volunteer nurse in the St John Ambulance, recalled running from Manchester Royal Infirmary to a first aid post through Seymour Park at the height of the raids. She told of the noise of the

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Read, *Manchester Boyhood*, p. 79.

<sup>88</sup> Wright, *Salford Blitz*, p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> Brenda Lees, *Letter to my Husband Christmas 1940* (BBC People's War, 2004) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/96/a2875296.shtml>> [accessed 4 September 2009] (para. 3).

detonating bombs, chains of shells from the ack-ack guns exploding in the sky and ‘the terrifying screams of bombs falling made my dash to the shelter a complete horror. Manchester was a raging inferno, encircled by a wall of fire, the sky for miles illuminated’.<sup>90</sup> Jean Slater, who was five when the war started, spoke of her mother, who was so scared by the sirens as she sheltered with 300 other people in Oxford Hall in Oxford Road, she had ‘many a personal accident’.<sup>91</sup>

Tony Bryan’s memory was of his last words to his mother, who would not go to a shelter in south Manchester because she was recovering in bed from an appendectomy. When she would not listen to his words of encouragement he retorted: ‘It’ll serve you right if you get killed.’ A German bomb ensured this was a dreadful prophecy and provided him with a lifetime of self-recrimination.<sup>92</sup> People with relatives in the armed forces had fears beyond the Blitz. Mancunian Margaret Gittings, who was 15 in 1941, lost two of her brothers, Arthur and Ralph Stringer, and the day her family was informed the first had been killed was so impressed on her memory she could remember the weather (crisp and bright), the time (late afternoon) and the date (26 October 1941). She wrote:

I saw my father weeping. I did not realise that men could weep. Nothing in my life had prepared me for this sorrow. My father’s silent weeping shocked me into thinking I must not weep, in case it made it worse for my parents, and it was quite some days before my tears came too.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Kathleen Fox, *Manchester Blitz 1940: The Worst Night* (BBC People’s War, 2004) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/90/a2396090.shtml>> [accessed 4 September 2009] (para. 11).

<sup>91</sup> Jean Slater, *My Memories: A Childhood in Manchester* (BBC People’s War, 2003) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/99/a2062199.shtml>> [accessed 4 September 2009] (para. 11).

<sup>92</sup> Tony Bryan, *Everlasting Words: Childhood Memories during War* (BBC People’s War, 2003) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/90/a2009990.shtml>> [accessed 4 September 2009] (para. 4).

<sup>93</sup> Margaret Gittings, *The Day the Telegram Came* (BBC People’s War, 2005) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/92/a3607292.shtml>> [accessed 4 September 2009] (para 5).

Women, trembling and wetting themselves, people nearly petrified with fears for themselves and loved ones, years of regret. These stories were from Mancunians but similar tales would be repeated wherever the bombs fell heavily. They did not make contemporary newspapers because they would have contradicted the myth that Britain ‘could take it’.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has used Home Intelligence and Mass Observation reports and diaries to show that reports in newspapers, both national and local, often did not reflect the mood of post-Blitz Manchester. Questions could be asked as to whether the number of Mass Observation reports represented a significant sample, and that their concerns might be as misleading as to the true mood as the forced optimism of newspaper columns, but their evidence is reinforced by the Home Intelligence reports and other contemporary accounts. From these it is clear that instead of maintaining the normal reporting conventions as listed by Curran, namely informing the public, scrutinising government, staging a public debate and expressing public opinion, newspapers in 1940 and 1941 became publishers of propaganda, ignoring official incompetence and the senses of panic and desolation felt by many of their audiences.<sup>94</sup> In short, the press stopped reporting the news. Cyril Dunn, a *Yorkshire Post* journalist who would later work for *The Observer*, was sent to Manchester on Boxing Day 1940 to report on the bombing, making a telling comment in his notebook under the heading ‘Bombing is a Messy Business’:

There were big fires everywhere, the air stank of smoke and the streets were full of black ash as if there’d been a volcanic eruption... The destruction was enormous and spectacular, but it’s ceased to make any impression on me. Even to see the whole of the Royal Exchange gutted and burning, whacking great buildings blasted

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<sup>94</sup> Curran, *Media Power*, p. 35

into ruin, water spurting into the road from burst mains, the cathedral; shattered glass everywhere like dirty drifts of pack ice – this scarcely bothered me.

I went around nervously collecting the same old stories. ‘All I want to do,’ said one publican who’d been blasted out of his cellar ‘is to get out of here and stop out. I’ve had enough.’ And a woman, ‘If only I could feel it was worth it, was helping to win the war. But this [the ruins of her pub] is everything we’ve worked for...’ I wrote the usual story about the cheerful courage and determined endurance of the Manchester folk.<sup>95</sup>

Dunn conformed to the myth, just as every journalist reporting the Manchester Blitz did. They refused to report that people were not always resilient when their houses were destroyed and their loved ones killed and that there were Mancunians openly questioning whether the war was worth pursuing. The consequence was a lingering resentment against the media and the spread of dark rumours because people could see what had been reported bore little relation to what had happened. Harrison reported for Home Intelligence that the ‘intense ballyhoo’ about wonderful morale after each town has been Blitzed had been a formula that ‘infuriated each place in turn’.<sup>96</sup> He stated that the BBC had suffered most because it was most reliant on official reports but extended his criticism to the media at large, writing ‘Confidence in news is therefore, at present, only moderate. There is much underlying scepticism about the news.’<sup>97</sup>

That became apparent within weeks of Manchester’s Blitz when the relative good shape of Liverpool’s morale disintegrated in May 1941. Repeated bombings stripped away the optimism of the previous Christmas and Home Intelligence reported a very different picture. An inspector, whose local knowledge was bolstered by his growing up in the city, made a follow-up visit and reported that the vehemence of the discontent about the local authorities was stronger there than in any city he had

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<sup>95</sup> Cyril Dunn. ‘Bombing is a Messy Business’, *Notebook XIV, November 1940 to April 1941*, 26 December 1940, cited in Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 215.

<sup>96</sup> Mass Observation, FR 568.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

visited. He noted an 'atmosphere of ineptitude' and 'lack of energy'. He added: 'Residents spoke of 'no power or drive left in Liverpool to counter-attack the *Luftwaffe*' ... For the first time in any town or place a conversation was heard in which one side argued in favour of our surrender.'<sup>98</sup>

The inspector reported that rumours were rife of peace demonstrations in Liverpool, a suggestion that was verified by a Mass Observation diarist, a Women's Auxilliary Air Force member in Preston, writing on 5 May 1941. She reported a woman named Jean saying: 'Everyone's talking about Liverpool... They say the people there want to give in.'<sup>99</sup> Twelve days later the diarist accepted a lift in a lorry and was told more about Liverpool: 'There's 50,917 dead and God knows how many wounded, just walking the streets, with their bandages on... There is a lot of military with bayonets – they've more or less taken it over.'<sup>100</sup> On the same day an observer in Leek, Staffordshire, also reported rumours of severe disruption in Liverpool, listing: train loads of unidentified corpses being sent from Merseyside for mass cremation; martial law being imposed in heavily bombed industrial areas; homeless and hungry people marching with white flags; food riots.<sup>101</sup> On this occasion, newspapers were correct to ignore such reports because the rumours were mainly false, but the reaction is an indictment of the press. It is indicative of the mood of the British public that the rumours were believed because people knew from their own experiences that the press had abdicated its responsibility to report objectively. Knowing that newspapers and other media would never report anything negative in respect of the fighting of the war, imaginations went on wild sorties towards pessimism. In terms of Manchester, Rita Maloney articulated the general lack of trust in this chapter, but there were other

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<sup>98</sup> Mass Observation, FR 706.

<sup>99</sup> Mass Observation, Box 1, *Propaganda*, 5 May 1941.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 17 May 1941.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*.

Mass Observation observers in the city who also questioned what news and entertainment outlets were printing and broadcasting. A 17-year-old Mancunian wrote: 'People now turn from the BBC news to the German quite automatically', while R. South, a journalist working in the city, encapsulated the generic feeling that attempts were being made to sway public opinion.<sup>102</sup> After watching *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, he wrote: 'We were left with the impression that it is a good propaganda film.'<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Mass Observation, D5081, Manchester Teenager, 17, 4 December 1939.

<sup>103</sup> *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, dir. by Anatole Litvak (Warner Bros., 1939); Mass Observation, D5204, R. South, 1 January 1940.

## Chapter 9

### Escaping the War

#### 1. Introduction

While the previous chapter showed disenchantment towards the media, the number of newspapers bought by the public increased between 1937 and 1947.<sup>1</sup> This seems contradictory, but also implies that the press, for all its perceived shortcomings, was satisfying some of the needs of the audience. Fussell argued that one was a desire for entertainment because the British public were looking for an escape from the grimness of life during the war and McNair pointed out that news values in Western democracies are flavoured by the requirement to ‘win audiences with entertainment as well as information’.<sup>2</sup> Newspaper circulations rose – the daily figure for the national press from 9.9 million in 1937 to 15.4 million 10 years later – but other forms of entertainment also boomed between 1939 and 1945: cinema audiences grew 58 per cent, the number of people listening to the radio increased and more people read books from the library.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will chart the public’s increased desire for escapism, exploring the press’s motivation for including lighter items in newspapers that had plenty of news to print and very few pages to fill. Alternative forms of entertainment such as cinema and radio will also be studied briefly. If newspapers were not selling then their contribution to a myth of unrelenting fortitude would have been negligible, so the non-news reports and features had an important role to play in satisfying an audience who, evidence suggests, grew increasingly sceptical of what they were reading about

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<sup>1</sup> Royal Commission, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, p. 189; McNair, *News and Journalism*, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1; Political and Economic Planning, *The British Film Industry* (London: PEP, 1952); A. Briggs, *The War of Words, 1939-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 18; Library Association, *A Century of Public Libraries: 1850-1950* (London: Library Association 1950).

the war. A quantitative analysis on the proportions of hard news, war and non-war, to comment, business and entertainment, will be applied to the eight Tuesday editions of the three Manchester newspapers beginning 17 December 1940 and the findings will be considered alongside research undertaken by the 1947-49 Royal Commission on the Press that analysed newspaper coverage in *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* in 1927, 1937 and 1947.

## 2. Entertaining the Masses

The mass evacuation of children from cities at the start of the war and the nightly journeys into safer, rural, areas provided physical means to escape the bombing, but there were intellectual ways too. Mancunians, like most Britons, suffered a variety of negative emotions from fright to war-weariness, and many took refuge in the diversions provided by newspapers and other media. The press had long realised that providing news was not its only role and Conboy identified that, early in their development, English newspapers, journals and periodicals had become ‘part of a generic hybrid between public information source, topical entertainment, communal identity and profit that together constituted journalism’ even by the time of the Commonwealth (1649-51).<sup>4</sup> This manifested itself in the nineteenth century partly in the publication of novels and short stories that promoted the careers of successful novelists like Charles Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle, and by the 1930s in a myriad of features that included cookery tips, crosswords, film reviews and gossip, problem pages and sport reports.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the proliferation of sport, which Bingham described as a ‘central ingredient in the development of the popular newspaper’, was a source of

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Conboy, ‘The Print Industry - Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow’, in *Print Journalism: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Richard Keeble (London: Routledge, 2005), 4-20 (p. 5).

<sup>5</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (London: Viking, 2011), p. 63; Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 96.



concern for the Royal Commission on the Press in 1949, which noted there was more space devoted to sport in *The Times*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* of 1927 and 1937 than to political, social and economic news.<sup>6</sup> On the subject of celebrity the Commission lamented that the popular press reported 'the matrimonial adventures of a film star as though they possessed the same intrinsic importance as events affecting the peace of a continent'.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the Commission's misgivings, Gannon stated that the new mass literate newspaper-buying public preferred 'entertainment to information' and, with the audience demanding to be diverted, newspapers responded and even editions reporting the Manchester Blitz contained large amounts of newsprint devoted to non-war items. For example, 86 per cent of the news coverage in the *Manchester Guardian's* four broadsheet pages on the 23 December 1940, the first edition with the opportunity to report the Manchester Blitz, was taken up by war related material, a proportion that was appropriate in the context of the news of the day. But the next day, when the newspaper had more time to follow-up the effects of the bombing, this amount of war news had dropped to a surprisingly small 43 per cent of the combined war, non-war and business copy, and page four had room for half a column on the Robinson Crusoe pantomime at the Palace Theatre, with Stanley Holloway and Leslie Henson starring.<sup>8</sup> This seems extraordinary in the light of the world events happening on the *Guardian* readers' doorsteps, but with the censor ensuring that details of the Manchester bombing, even that it had happened at all, were kept to a minimum, the newspaper was faced with either filling its pages with non-war items or with reports of bombing elsewhere that would have alienated its audience needing recognition of its suffering.

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<sup>6</sup> Bingham, *Gender*, p. 219; Royal Commission, p. 250.

<sup>7</sup> Royal Commission, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix 2; *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1940, p. 4.

The *Manchester Evening News*, as a local paper, had a greater freedom to report the Blitz, but still devoted large amounts of space to non-news items. This could be used for a variety of purposes and on 1 January 1941, a week after the Manchester Blitz, the *Evening News* used an entertainment report and picture on the front page as a propaganda tool, emphasising a return to normality after the Manchester Blitz with the headline: 'Morning Panto is crammed'.<sup>9</sup> Inevitably, the war played prominent parts in plenty of entertainment elements, the letter on page four of the 19 December issue, headlined 'He writes: I have met someone else', being typical. 'My sweetheart, who is in the army, has just written to tell me he has just met another girl,' the letter, signed 'Heartbroken', read.<sup>10</sup> How this would have played to the many wives and girl friends left alone because of enlistment is not recorded, but it was part of the popular newspaper strategy of reporting melodrama to which its readers could relate.

Most days in the study period the *Evening Chronicle* carried a short piece of fiction, usually with only a slight reference to the war, and every day there was a light-hearted entertainment/comment piece headed 'The Northern Window' by 'Denys'. There was also significant entertainment coverage, the 13 January edition carrying three advertisements for Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator*, one for pantomime *Cinderella*, and one for Belle Vue Circus.<sup>11</sup> The 15 January edition devoted a quarter of page three and half of page four to the January Sales, with page five supplementing the paid-for centimetres with a promotional piece headed 'Wartime Bargains'.<sup>12</sup> There was also a diminished amount of space devoted to sport, including a display of dark humour on 20 January when page three reported that

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<sup>9</sup> 'Morning Panto is Crammed', *Manchester Evening News*, 1 January 1941, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> 'He Writes "I Have Met Someone Else"', *Manchester Evening News*, 19 December 1940, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Evening Chronicle*, 13 January 1941, p. 2

<sup>12</sup> 'Wartime Bargains', *Evening Chronicle*, 15 January 1941, p. 5.

Lancashire had posted a message outside its Old Trafford cricket ground reading ‘No play today, bad ground’.<sup>13</sup> Quite apart from it being outside the normal season of April to September, two bombs had blasted the Test pitch. The most insensitive advertisement also appeared on the front page of the *Evening Chronicle* in January 1941 under large type reading: ‘Lost in Manchester’.<sup>14</sup> The absent article in question was Cinderella’s glass slipper, but less than a fortnight after the Blitz, with Mancunians mourning and some looking for the bodies of relatives, the inclusion could be described as ill-timed at the very least and said something about the separation between newspapers and their audience.

Weather, normally a staple of national and local newspapers, proved to be a thorny issue for newspapers, as has been seen earlier. The *Evening News*’s worries about revealing details of the weather to the enemy led to the Pilgrim Papers column giving false information when it announced the weather had been so good a cricket match had taken place between Kent and Lancashire in January:

The cricket was bright enough to make us forget the war. True, enemy aircraft were sighted high over the pavilion about noon, and during lunch a Heinkel was brought down near the ladies enclosure, but it was a grand catch that got rid of Ames at extra cover.<sup>15</sup>

The report was intending to demonstrate the absurdity of a country that ‘has no weather’ but it did not prevent the columnist, writing under the pseudonym Mr Dare Not Lie, from being upbraided by a reader for suggesting Lancashire’s bowling attack was so feeble that Kent had scored 509 for 2 on the first day. ‘Were Kent playing Bootle Boys Brigade or Oldham Old Age Pensioners?’, Albert from Oswaldtwistle asked. ‘I strongly suspect you are a man of Kent or a Kentish man, or both.’<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Pitch Hit’, *Evening Chronicle*, 20 January 1941, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Evening Chronicle*, 3 January 1941, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Phew! Mr Censor’, *Manchester Evening News*, 22 January 1940, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Not Out, Sir’, *Manchester Evening News*, 29 January 1940, p. 4.

The press was not alone in being able to point to improving figures, as there was a parallel rise in the consumption of all literature. Book sales, particularly paperbacks, rose and borrowing from libraries increased, going from 247 million in 1939 to 359 million in 1953.<sup>17</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the number of books borrowed by young people in Manchester in November 1940 rose to 79,020, an increase of 25,790 compared to November 1939.<sup>18</sup> The total number of books issued in the city was 422,113, a rise of 49,150 on the previous year and a record for any November. The most significant increase, however, came in the radio audience. The BBC, the only home-based broadcaster in Britain during the war, expanded its staff from 4,800 in September 1939 to 11,663 in March 1944, trebled its output in terms of hours, increased its transmitter power five times, and expanded its foreign language services from 10 to 45 in 1943.<sup>19</sup> By 1944 the BBC's 9 pm news programme was estimated to reach 43 to 50 per cent of the population and the BBC recorded its audience at 34 million (out of a population of 48 million).<sup>20</sup>

This success emerged from an inauspicious start because the BBC's output at the start of the war lacked popular appeal and the first radio personality of the conflict was Germany-based. In the autumn of 1939 as many as six million Britons tuned in regularly to Lord Haw-Haw's broadcasts from Berlin and by January 1940, 25 per cent of the population said they had listened to his programme the previous day.<sup>21</sup> This failure to engage with the audience was not entirely the BBC's fault because measures to protect the print industry had handicapped its news-gathering in the build-up to the war and, once the war had started, the scrutiny of the MOI ensured

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<sup>17</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 212; Butler and Sloman, *Political Facts*, p. 313.

<sup>18</sup> 'Manchester Reading More Books', *Manchester Guardian*, 19 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Briggs, *War of Words*, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43. The scale of licence evasion meant the true figure could have been as high as 40 million (Nicholas, *Echo of War*, p. 12).

<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 126.

bland and dated programmes.<sup>22</sup> Mass Observation also reported that the public had little trust in what it was hearing on the BBC.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, by the end of the war 'it was radio, not newspapers, which assumed greatest prominence as purveyor of wartime news.'<sup>24</sup> This was due in part to the BBC's refusal to be cowed into persistent misrepresentation. Churchill wanted control of the corporation but, with the help of the MOI, the BBC argued that a restriction of this nature would be counter-productive, its 1941 handbook insisting that 'no permanent propaganda policy can in the modern world be based on untruthfulness'.<sup>25</sup> There was also a change in the programming on the Home Service to copy the successful variety and dance music-focused Forces Network.<sup>26</sup>

Like the BBC, cinemas showed a significant increase in numbers. *Gone With The Wind* was the 'box office phenomenon of the war years' and other, hugely popular, films included *Mrs Miniver* and *Random Harvest*, which topped the UK box office numbers in 1942 and 1943 respectively.<sup>27</sup> Cinemas were closed in Britain as soon as war was declared in an inauspicious over-reaction that was reversed a week later in non-urban theatres and even London (until 6 pm) by 15 September 1939. On 4 October all cinemas were allowed to stay open until 10 pm and from 4 November 1939 until 11 pm.<sup>28</sup> Bomb damage, shortages of equipment and staff and a lack of new films caused problems but of Britain's approximately 4,800 cinemas in existence at the start of the war, it has been estimated that 'the maximum number closed at any

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<sup>22</sup> Pronay, 'The News Media at War', p. 182. The output from the BBC in the initial months of the war was dominated by official broadcasts, talks by civil servants and experts on topics such as the blackout and making the most of rationed food (Williams, *Murder*, p. 136).

<sup>23</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

<sup>24</sup> Carruthers, *Media at War*, p. 81.

<sup>25</sup> Briggs, *War of Words*, pp. 32, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Murder*, p. 137.

<sup>27</sup> *Gone With The Wind*, dir. by Victor Fleming (MGM, 1939), *Mrs Miniver*, dir. by William Wyler, (MGM, 1942), *Random Harvest*, dir. by Mervyn LeRoy, (MGM, 1942); Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Mass Observation, FR 24, *The Cinema in the First Three Months of the War*, January 1940.

one stage of the war was probably never more than 10 per cent of the total.’<sup>29</sup> Seat prices also had to rise thanks to increased taxation in the form of the Excess Profits Tax and an Entertainments Tax, which was raised three times during the war and by 1945 amounted to 36 per cent of gross receipts.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, there was a dramatic increase in average weekly attendance, which rose from 19 million in 1939 to more than 30 million in 1945.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Investigating the Newspapers

This section will examine how much space was allocated by Manchester’s newspapers to non-war news and other, lighter, items with a quantitative analysis over the eight weeks of the study. The methodology chapter outlined why Tuesday was chosen as the most appropriate day for this analysis and the contents of eight editions of each of the three newspapers, making 24 in total, were measured. The war was the pre-eminent story in 1940 and 1941, particularly after Manchester was bombed in the Christmas Blitz, and this was duly reflected in the coverage but other subjects intruded on the news agenda. This study divided them into six other categories, five of which were: crime and other non-war news; comment, including editorials and leaders; business; photographs and cartoons; advertisements. The final category was loosely combined as entertainment. Harcup and O’Neill identified five sub-categories making up entertainment – picture opportunities; reference to sex; reference to animals; humour; Showbiz/TV – but their news values were framed 60 years after the Manchester Blitz and bore little relation to those of the 1940s.<sup>32</sup> Sex, for example, was barely mentioned outside court reports and instead, for this study, the category

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<sup>29</sup> PEP, *British Film Industry*, pp. 80-81, cited in Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Harcup, and O’Neill, ‘What is News?’, pp. 274-75.

comprised: pools coupons; puzzles; gardening and other advice columns; film, book and theatre reviews; short stories; sport. Humorous columns were included in the entertainment category, while readers' letters, many of which referred to the war, were included in the figures for comment.

The *Manchester Guardian* comprised 10 pages in seven of the eight editions, the exception being 24 December 1940 that had eight. This might have been due to the Christmas holiday or it might reflect the difficult circumstances in which the newspaper was published, as the night of 23/24 December was the second of the Manchester Blitz. Only advertisements, mainly classified, were on the front page, and at least 21 per cent of the content was paid for in all eight editions of the *Guardian*.<sup>33</sup> In the 31 December edition that proportion rose to 28 per cent.<sup>34</sup> This commercial input was vital for all newspapers the war because the price of newsprint rose from £11 10s (£11.50) per ton in 1938 to £45 10 years later yet profits rose.<sup>35</sup> National newspapers voluntarily reduced the amount of advertising in 1940 because newsprint rationing reduced editions to a third of their pre-war size and, as a consequence the reader became the most important source of cash, the London-based dailies deriving 69 per cent of their revenue in sales in 1943 compared to 30 per cent in 1938.<sup>36</sup> The Royal Commission on the Press in 1949 reported: 'The provincial newspapers in particular benefited from the greater demand for their advertising space and from the reduction of the competitive pressure of the London papers.'<sup>37</sup> In 1936 the *Daily Mail* carried 1,308 column inches (3322 centimetres) of advertising, in 1947 it carried only

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<sup>33</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Royal Commission, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> The voluntary curtailment was formalised in 1942 when regulations restricted the proportion of space newspapers could devote to advertising (Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 62); *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>37</sup> Royal Commission, p. 5.

326 (828).<sup>38</sup> Instead of newspapers competing to sell advertising space, advertisers had to wait their turn for the limited space available for a number of years. The Royal Commission report added: 'Nationwide advertising pushed out of the London papers were glad to find space in the provinces.'<sup>39</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* benefitted from this commercial movement from the capital and the newspaper, appropriately, paid great attention to commerce, devoting at least one page and frequently two to news from the City of London and Manchester's Stock Exchange, averaging 13 per cent of the newspaper, and 18 per cent of the journalistic copy, over the study period. The proportion of business news rose to 25 per cent of the journalistic copy in the 24 December 1940 newspaper, amounting to 534 centimetres (out of 2,150 centimetres) in an edition that could report the aftermath of the first night of the Manchester Blitz and had the running story of the second night of the bombardment.<sup>40</sup> War news, most of it from outside Manchester, amounted to only 594 centimetres of the 24 December edition, making it the second largest contributor to the edition after advertising but still a small amount given the context of the local news available.<sup>41</sup>

Over the study period, war news comprised 20 per cent of the *Manchester Guardian* and even when non-journalistic elements – cartoons, photographs and advertisements – were excluded, the percentage was 28 (Table 1). The editions in which war news was most prominent were 7 January and 4 February 1941 in which they filled 28 and 26 per cent of the newspaper (45 and 41 per cent of the written copy) respectively, but the work of the censor may be detected here because these newspapers came more than 20 days after the raids on Manchester on 23 December

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*



and 10 January.<sup>42</sup> Typically, nearly three-quarters of the journalistic copy was devoted to news other than the war, with entertainment forming 18 per cent of the total. A short story appeared in every edition on the back page, alongside the readers' letters, and a crossword and the radio listings were printed on page two. Sport was severely restricted during the war and this was reflected in the amount of space it filled in the *Guardian*, 400 centimetres over eight editions, or 1.4 per cent of the newspaper.<sup>43</sup> Its peak contribution to the news space was 3.5 per cent of the 21 January edition. By comparison, *The Times* devoted 18, 21 and 16 per cent of its news space to sport in its 1927, 1937 and 1947 newspapers.<sup>44</sup> The figures for the equivalent editions of the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* were 27, 36, 33 and 37, 36, 24 per cent respectively.<sup>45</sup>

Table 1

***Manchester Guardian***  
**Proportions of the newspapers on Tuesdays from 17 December 1940 to 4 February 1941**

	Total column centimetres	Percentage	Percentage of journalistic copy
War	5802	20	28
Non-war	4086	14	20
Comment	3320	11	16
Entertainment	3640	12	18
Business	3670	13	18
Cartoons/Photographs	1779	6	-
Advertisements	7003	24	-
<b>Total</b>	29300	100	100

The *Manchester Evening News* comprised six broadsheet pages throughout the study period, pages four and five of which were made up entirely of advertisements and births, marriages and deaths in every edition except 24 December.<sup>46</sup> The importance of the *Evening News* in terms of financing the group was mentioned

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Royal Commission, p. 250

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Appendix 2.

earlier in the thesis and advertising in the evening paper was critical for both the newspaper and the loss-making sister publication, the *Manchester Guardian*. Paid-for content comprised an average of 56 per cent of the newspaper, never falling below 40 per cent and rising to 60 per cent of the 7 January edition. War news averaged 15 per cent of the newspaper over the eight Tuesdays, reaching its peak on 31 December when the censors were relaxing the restrictions on what could be reported about the Manchester Blitz (Table 2). War reports comprised 35 per cent of the journalistic copy (excluding pictures/cartoons and advertising) for the eight weeks and, as business reports made up only three per cent, this meant that more than 60 per cent of the written content was filled by non-war, comment and entertainment items, though the last was a surprisingly low 10 per cent.

Table 2

***Manchester Evening News***  
**Proportions of the newspapers on Tuesdays from 17 December 1940 to 4 February 1941**

	Total column centimetres	Percentage	Percentage of journalistic copy
War	2684	15	35
Non-war	2892	16	38
Comment	1046	6	14
Entertainment	734	4	10
Business	229	1	3
Cartoons/Photographs	377	2	-
Advertisements	9990	56	-
<b>Total</b>	17952	100	100

The *Evening Chronicle* was also a six-page newspaper throughout the study period but it laid greater emphasis on entertainment, devoting 18 per cent of the newspaper to lighter elements including a gardening advice and show business news, the Northern Window column and the crossword (Table 3).<sup>47</sup> This meant entertainment filled more of the Evening Chronicle than any other category but

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<sup>47</sup> Appendix 2.

Tuesday was the edition that included pools coupons, so the figure might have been slightly inflated from the norm. Sports news averaged 1.5 per cent of the paper, rising to 5 per cent of the 24 December edition in the build-up to the Christmas holiday period.<sup>48</sup> War news comprised 17 per cent of the editions, rising to 36 per cent of the Christmas Eve newspaper, making up nearly half the journalistic copy.

Table 3

***Evening Chronicle***  
**Proportions of the newspapers on Tuesdays from 17 December 1940 to 4 February 1941**

	Total column centimetres	Percentage	Percentage of journalistic copy
War	3535	17	31
Non-war	2399	11	21
Comment	1079	5	9
Entertainment	3677	18	32
Business	673	3	6
Cartoons/Photographs	524	3	-
Advertisements	9057	43	-
<b>Total</b>	20944	100	99

Variations in percentage due to rounding up and down

#### 4. Conclusion

The key statistic that can be drawn from this analysis is that the war on average filled only 20 per cent or less of Manchester's newspapers. This might seem surprising given that it was by far the most important story in 1940 and 1941, particularly after the Christmas Blitz, but it tallied with a survey undertaken by Home Intelligence that revealed 60 per cent of interviewees read newspapers for items other than war news.<sup>49</sup> The same report discovered that readers felt there was too much propaganda, which was making them feel apathetic about the war. Rising numbers for

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

other forms of entertainment suggested the audiences wanted a distraction and this was reflected in newspapers' news values. Jack Fuller wrote:

Every newspaper, from the most cosmopolitan national daily to the smallest rural weekly, is provincial. To survive, a newspaper must reflect a specific audience, usually by holding up a mirror to a particular place. It must share with its readers a sensibility and a set of interests, tastes and values.<sup>50</sup>

There were other imperatives. Even without the restrictions on reporting the effects of the bombing, weather and so on, the censor's work elsewhere encouraged newspapers to report non-war items. Entertainment and lighter news, like crime, gave Manchester's editors, who were restricted in what they could publish about the war, an opportunity to make their newspapers distinctive. The evidence suggests they grasped that opportunity.

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<sup>50</sup> Jack Fuller, *News Values* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 69.

## Chapter 10

### The Moving News Agenda

#### 1. Introduction

Wars are exceptional in that events move quickly and incidents that would remain in the news agenda in normal times are swiftly overtaken. In the Second World War Germany launched bombing raids on Britain, to a lesser and greater extent, for five years, so even hugely significant local events, such as the Manchester Blitz, expeditiously descended the news agenda. Within a week of the Christmas raids on Manchester, London suffered the big raid on 29 December – during which Mason’s famous picture of St Paul’s Cathedral was taken – and what was happening in Piccadilly, Manchester, was superseded by Piccadilly in the West End. For national newspapers news priorities moved 200 miles south very quickly; what was surprising was that Manchester’s newspapers followed just as rapidly.

The censor was partly to blame. Randall noted that timing is important:

News, unlike wine, does not improve with keeping. Elapsed time, however, is not the most important of factors in itself. If you learn of a major development three weeks after it has occurred, the crucial factor is not the delay, but how many people have learnt of the development in the meantime. If the story is still not public knowledge, the three-week interval will not significantly reduce the news value... Timing is more often a negative factor, subtracting value when there are delays which allow the story to become widely known.<sup>1</sup>

With the censor insisting that national newspapers could not name bombed cities until it was certain the Germans knew where they had raided, normally meaning a delay of two days, and restrictions on identifying localities and damage to buildings for 28 days, the news value was diminished, particularly when the local population could witness the damage with their own eyes. There was also an eagerness to subsume the Manchester narrative into the national one constructed around St Paul’s, the City and

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<sup>1</sup> Randall, *Universal Journalist*, p. 26.

the East End.<sup>2</sup> This meant that even in late December 1940, when the city and its people were at their lowest, there was no distinctive northern voice recorded in Manchester's newspapers.

This thesis has indicated that there was an element within the Manchester public who believed their suffering did not get the media attention it merited and the newspapers' inclination to move on contributed to the mythology of the Blitz because they did not report the mood of the people over a longer period. This chapter will examine whether Mancunians had grounds for their grievance with an analysis of the three Manchester newspapers to chart the Christmas Blitz's fall down the news agenda. This will be done by enumerating the references to the air raids of 22/23 and 23/24 December and the subsequent repair to the city's infrastructure, the re-housing of the homeless, and the lessons learned by the emergency services. A quantitative analysis of the references to the raid on the seven subsequent Tuesdays will be undertaken.

To ensure that the *Manchester Guardian*, *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening* were not exceptional, they will be compared to the coverage that appeared in other newspapers: two nationals, *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror*, and the local weekly, the *Salford City Reporter*. These newspapers were chosen for their contrasting audiences. The *Mirror* was a left-leaning paper that was targeted at the working class, while *The Times*, described by Gannon as 'incomparably the most important British newspaper of the 1930s', was conservative (and Conservative) in nature, regarded as the newspaper for the establishment and had in its editor from 1929 to 1941, Geoffrey Dawson, a lifelong friend of Lord Halifax, the Foreign

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<sup>2</sup> Calder, *Myth*, p. XIV.

Secretary at the start of the war.<sup>3</sup> Dawson was also an acquaintance of Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain. Price described Dawson as ‘the nearest thing Baldwin had to a confidant in Fleet Street’, and was very closely connected to the Conservative Party.<sup>4</sup> It is easy to stereotype *The Times*’s readership in 1940 and 1941 as resolutely reactionary, but the letter printed on 15 January 1941 from Lieutenant-Colonel R. C. Bingham was not untypical. He wrote:

Never has the old school tie and the best that it stands for more justified than it is today. Our new armies are being officered by classes of society who are new to the job. The middle, lower-middle and working classes are now receiving the King’s Commission. These classes, unlike the old aristocratic and feudal (almost) classes who led the army, never had ‘their people’ to consider. They have never had anyone to think of but themselves. This aspect of life is completely new to them and they have largely fallen down on it in their capacity as army officers.... Man management is not a subject which can be ‘taught’: it is an attitude of mind, and with the old school tie men this was instinctive and part of the philosophy of life.<sup>5</sup>

It is not a letter one might have expected to read in the *Daily Mirror* in 1941.

The *Salford City Reporter* had a narrowly defined, and largely working class, audience and its coverage rarely strayed even into other parts of Greater Manchester. Formed in 1879 by Peter Hampson, it remained in his family and in the 1940s was owned and edited by Capt. Stuart Hirst Hampson.<sup>6</sup> A weekly paper published on Fridays, it merged with the *Salford Chronicle and Telephone* in 1926 but never threatened the dominance of its Manchester neighbours and the city’s only mention in the 1949 Royal Commission on the Press was its distinction as the largest conurbation outside Greater London with no daily paper.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in the terms of this study, it provided an appropriate counterpoint to the above national newspapers and another example by which to weigh the reporting in Manchester’s newspapers.

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<sup>3</sup> Bingham and Conboy, ‘*Daily Mirror*’, p. 643; Gannon, *British Press*, p. 56; Mass Observation, FR 126, described *The Times* as a ‘purely class A-B’ newspaper, while the *Daily Mirror*’s readers were ‘predominantly working class’, but with a larger sample than expected of ‘A-B women’.

<sup>4</sup> Price, *Where Power Lies*, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Man Management’, *Times*, 15 January 1941, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> ‘S. H. Hampson’, *Times*, 13 Jan 1956, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Royal Commission, p. 11.

## 2. Analysing the News after the Manchester Blitz

The way the news focus moved quickly away from Manchester was best illustrated by *The Observer*, a national Sunday newspaper whose first opportunity to report and reflect on what had happened in the city on 22/23 and 23/24 December was in its 29 December issue. Sunday newspapers, according to Hamilton, should analyse and amplify the news – 'On a busy weekday, people wanted newspapers with well-organised, instantly accessible information. But on Sundays they wanted something more.' – yet only three reports contained the word 'Manchester' in *The Observer* on 29 December and one of those was on the sports page about football results.<sup>8</sup> The principal story was on page two and comprised only nine short paragraphs and 17 centimetres of print on the previous day's mass burial at Southern Cemetery.<sup>9</sup> Given that *The Observer* was printed too early to report on the previous night's attack on the capital when the *Luftwaffe* dropped 10,000 incendiaries – a headline read 'Quiet day in London' – such neglect reflected the eagerness of all editors to report the latest news rather than reflect on past events.<sup>10</sup>

*The Observer* was and is a national newspaper and had to satisfy an audience that was far wider than Manchester. Yet, surprisingly, both the *Manchester Evening News* and the *Evening Chronicle* also failed properly to report the aftermath of the city's Blitz, neglecting to highlight the deficiencies listed by Home Intelligence, to report the plethora of human interest stories, or to examine the restoration to normality or the rebuilding of the transport and utility infrastructure. By 30 December, eight days after the first night of the raids, the concentration of the *Evening Chronicle* was on London. The main headline read: 'Guildhall and other

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<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, p. 86; 'Football: Yesterday's Results Rugby Union, *Observer*, 29 December 1940, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> 'Mass Funeral in Manchester: Air Raid Victims Buried', *Observer*, 29 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> 'Quiet Day in London', *Observer*, 29 December 1940, p. 7.



famous buildings damaged', while the strap line was 'Nazis' deliberate attempt to fire city of London'. This was complemented by a picture of the wrecked Guildhall, with a headline 'Nazis chose this as a target'.<sup>11</sup> The only Manchester reference on page one was a small article reporting a message to the city's people from the chairman of the Manchester Emergency Committee.<sup>12</sup>

Looking at the *Evening Chronicle* editions published on Tuesdays from 24 December 1940 to 4 February 1941 there is a clear pattern of diminishing coverage of the Manchester Blitz. On 24 December there were six stories about the attacks on the front page and on the back page there was a report headlined: 'Manchester is keeping its chin up'.<sup>13</sup> Seven days later, the number of front page reports had fallen 33 per cent to four, but the lead story had no reference to the city at all, and concentrated on the battle in the north Atlantic.<sup>14</sup> This was a surprising choice in news terms because the second lead was headlined: 'City had fewer than 500 dead'.<sup>15</sup> The figure was a fiction, but normative news values would have concentrated on what was still a huge number of fatalities, with a headline emphasising the rising death toll. These values were contemporary: Henry Wickham Steed, a former editor of *The Times*, was quoted by Home Intelligence in May 1940 defining news as 'something exceptional, something out of the ordinary run'.<sup>16</sup> The death of 500 local people was unprecedented.

If the coverage on 31 December was clearly affected by the censor, by 7 January 1941 the editorial judgement of the newspaper was becoming clearer because there was not a single report on the Manchester Blitz, a surprise omission given that

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<sup>11</sup> 'Guildhall and Other Famous Buildings Damaged', *Evening Chronicle*, 30 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> 'Tribute', *Evening Chronicle*, 30 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> 'Manchester is Keeping its Chin Up', *Evening Chronicle*, 24 December 1940, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> 'Nearer to Beating U-Boat', *Evening Chronicle*, 31 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> 'City Had Fewer Than 500 Dead', *Evening Chronicle*, 31 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

the city was only just beginning to recover. Only the advertisements on the back page indicated that something extraordinary had happened to the city. One read:

'Manchester carries on and so do the Fifty Shilling Tailors', while another, from a shoemakers, told customers that its St Mary's Gate shop would be restored but asked customers to 'kindly make use of the other Manchester branches'.<sup>17</sup> There was no reference to the Blitz in the 14 January edition, two in the 21 January newspaper, one on 28 January and none on 4 February (see Table 4, below).

The attention of the *Manchester Evening News* moved even more quickly than the *Evening Chronicle* and there was no reference to the city on the front page of 27 December, only the third edition after the Manchester Blitz. By 6 January 1941 there was not a single domestic report on page one, with every story referring to foreign news. Paradoxically, the following day the *Evening News* led on a follow-up story to London's raid on 29 December, something they neglected to when it came to its own city. Reporting the bombing of the BBC, the report began: 'Today it can be revealed that Broadcasting House has twice been hit during raids and has been seriously damaged.'<sup>18</sup> The BBC was the national broadcaster so the report would have had impact on the *Evening News*'s readers, but the contrast is still stark.

This reflected the *Evening News*'s news agenda, no doubt influenced by its editor Haley, who was reported as saying that the capital was of prime importance, adding: 'Nothing in the North signified.'<sup>19</sup> This was a clear departure from the usual framing of local news and was borne out by a quantitative analysis of the references to the Manchester raids. The 24 December edition carried three large reports on page one and seven days later there was only one reference on the main news page,

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<sup>17</sup> *Evening Chronicle*, 7 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> 'BBC Staff Killed, but Programmes Went On', *Manchester Evening News*, 7 January 1941, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Koss, *Rise and Fall*, p. 388.

highlighting, the need for more firewatchers.<sup>20</sup> This edition proved to be a high point, however, because the eight reports in total had fallen to one on 7 January 1941 and on 14 January there was only an advice column on the back page, headlined: '11 tips for Blitz victims who have a claim.'<sup>21</sup>

As the raids on the city became more sporadic later in 1941, this attention wandered even further and an attack on Chorlton-cum-Hardy, an area to the south of the city centre, not only failed to make the front page but was relegated to a short single-column story on page six.<sup>22</sup> A heavier raid received more coverage but the emphasis was on Manchester's air defences rather than the bombers, and any sense of objectivity had been surrendered. Indeed, the report could have come from a novel or a boys' comic. It read:

Twenty three German bombers – a grand new record – were destroyed during widespread attacks on Britain last night. Twenty-two fell to our ever-deadlier night fighters. AA gunners blasted the 23<sup>rd</sup> out of the sky, and a number of others were damaged. One night fighter pilot chased his quarry 40 miles before sending in a deadly burst.<sup>23</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian*, as a national newspaper, had a greater interest in reflecting the national picture and it, too quickly, switched its focus. On 27 December, the first edition when reporters could reflect on the damage to the city, the lead story on the main news page was the battle for a town on the Libya-Egypt border, and the aftermath of the Manchester Blitz did not even make the top of the page.<sup>24</sup> Instead it appeared below a separate report headlined:

#### CHRISTMAS LULL IN AIR WAR

No Bombing Attacks on Britain or on Germany.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> 'Extend the Watch', *Manchester Evening News*, 31 December 1940, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> '11 Tips for Blitz Victims who have a Claim', *Manchester Evening News*, 14 January 1941, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> 'Short, Swift Raid in N-W', *Manchester Evening News*, 2 May 1941, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> '23 Down in One Night: 22 by Fighters', *Manchester Evening News*, 8 May 1941, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> 'The Siege of Bardia', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940

The work of the censor can be detected here because it is a non-story and even the report on the city's bombing, the bulk of which was below the fold, lacked human interest in that its headline focussed on a bureaucratic exercise: a survey.<sup>26</sup> This avoidance of the 'human angle' was contrary to accepted reporting norms as defined by a Home Intelligence report seven months earlier. It read:

After news of a battle has been printed and become stale, it is usually followed up by accounts of interviews with those who took part in it, what they said, what they felt, etc... Getting the 'human angle' on news has the advantage of making events come alive to the reader, of stirring him by personal detail.<sup>27</sup>

This anxiety to move on was reflected elsewhere in the *Guardian* and within a week, the main headlines on consecutive editions were: 'Last night's heavy bombing of London', 'Night fighters in action over London' and 'Guildhall destroyed: City churches suffer'.<sup>28</sup> This was in line with the number of references to the Manchester Blitz over the study period. On 24 December 1940 the most illuminating aspect of the edition was the warning to boil drinking water referred to earlier in the thesis. There were four reports on the raids and that increased to five by 31 December and six by 7 January as the censor allowed more to be reported. That proved to be the peak in terms of coverage, because there were only three references to the Manchester Blitz in the 14 January 1941 newspaper, one on 21 January and two on 28 January, an extraordinary neglect in view of the scope for stories. Visually, the largest coverage of the Manchester Blitz in all the Tuesday editions came on 4 February 1941 when page three carried five photographs, comprising 182 centimetres, of Wendell Willkie's visit to Manchester. The previous chapters have highlighted that Mancunians felt their suffering had been under-reported and it is perhaps a reflection of their need to share

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<sup>26</sup> 'A Manchester Survey After Attack', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1940, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

<sup>28</sup> 'Last Night's Heavy Bombing of London', *Manchester Guardian*, 28 December 1940, p. 7; 'Night Fighters in Action over London', *Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1940, p. 5; 'Guildhall Destroyed: City Churches Suffer', *Manchester Guardian*, 31 December 1940, p. 5.

the news of the city's plight that a *Guardian* advertisement offered readers the opportunity to order reprints of the 14 January edition with a particular story, 'They came to Manchester', the principal attraction.<sup>29</sup> 'In many cases readers wanted copies to send to relatives and friends at home or abroad,' the advertising copy read.<sup>30</sup> The article in question, a single column 65 centimetres long, was narrative in tone, the introduction being typical:

Do you remember Manchester? The rain, the soot, the businessmen with their bowler hats and their neatly rolled umbrellas, and the trams. Do you remember those narrow alley-ways, paved with rough cobbles and perpetually running with muddy water which were so proudly and so mistakenly described as streets?<sup>31</sup>

The report was full of stereotypes – 'Every self-respecting Manchester man carries an umbrella' – and propaganda and skirted over much of the damage, yet the initial print could not meet the demand. A week later a second reprint was announced because 'the first supply was exhausted within a few hours'.<sup>32</sup>

Table 4

**News stories on the Manchester Blitz on Tuesdays from 24 December 1940 to 4 February 1941**

	Manchester Guardian	Manchester Evening News	Evening Chronicle
24 December 1940	4	4	7
31 December 1940	5	8	7
07 January 1941	6	1	0
14 January 1941	3	1	0
21 January 1941	1	5	2
28 January 1941	2	2	1
04 February 1941	2	0	0

The hunger for news about the Manchester Blitz was clearly there, making the decision to leave the aftermath largely unreported more inexplicable in terms of the contemporary news values.

<sup>29</sup> 'They Came to Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1941, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28 January 1941, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> 'They Came to Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1941, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 4 February 1941, p. 4.

### 3. *The Times*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Salford City Reporter*

The above suggests there was demand for news of the Blitz, but Manchester's newspapers did not linger over their own city's attack. Were they atypical? Analysis of two national titles and the weekly newspaper in neighbouring Salford over the same period shows they were not. *The Times*, typically, comprised 10 broadsheet pages over the study period and cost 2d (less than 1 pence). Of those, only five contained foreign and domestic news, two were devoted to finance, one was filled with births, marriages and deaths and two contained only small advertisements. In terms of space, news made up 50 per cent of the newspaper, but war news made up only 30 per cent of the entire edition. The main difference between *The Times* and Manchester's newspapers was the amount of space given to entertainment, just a quarter of a page, with sports news amounting to just four shorts that filled eight centimetres of newsprint. Closer analysis of the copy showed that news travelled slowly to London where the offices of *The Times* were based, so while the *Guardian* gave extensive reports on the first night of the Manchester Blitz, albeit cloaked as a North-West inland town, the only mention of that raid in *The Times* came in a report headed 'Raids again on Merseyside' and even that was only in passing: 'For the third successive night enemy aircraft were over Liverpool last evening as well as another town in the North-West.'<sup>33</sup> The censor's work was evident but the following night restrictions had clearly been lifted because *The Times*'s lead story was:

SEVERE RAID ON MANCHESTER

Many Buildings Burnt Down

ALL-NIGHT ATTACK<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> 'Raids Again on Merseyside', *Times*, 23 December 1940, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> 'Severe Raid on Manchester', *Times*, 24 December 1940, p. 2.

The report referred to the raid on the Sunday night, rather than Monday, which is why the target could be named, but if the censor was relaxing his grip over the use of Manchester, there was plenty of evidence of propaganda in the copy in that it emphasised civilian targets. The report listed the damage to a large block of shops, a clothing store, a theatre and a hotel, while, lower down, it reported: 'Bombs fell on two public shelters, one accommodating nearly 500 people, and casualties were caused.'<sup>35</sup>

If that suggested to *The Times*'s readers that things were dire in Manchester, readers were reassured in the paper's next edition, 27 December. Under the headline 'Restoring order in Manchester' a report read: 'It is serious enough but not as much as one would have expected after seeing flames which, besides eating up buildings, acted as beacons for the raiders.'<sup>36</sup> By it were the headlines: 'A raid-free Christmas' and 'Merrymaking in the shelters', neither of which referred to Manchester. With that optimistic postscript, Manchester virtually disappeared from the *The Times*'s news agenda and there were passing references to the raids on the city in only nine more reports until 4 February 1941, and one of those was a single sentence announcing the abandonment of the New Year's Day meeting at the local horse-racing track.<sup>37</sup> There were suggestions of criticism of Manchester's preparation but only hints, the most obvious being a report on 9 January which had the headlines:

LESSONS OF THE BOMBING

GATE-CRASHING OF REST CENTRES

MANCHESTER CRITICISMS<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> 'Restoring Order in Manchester', *Times*, 27 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> 'Manchester Meeting Abandoned', *Times*, 28 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> 'Lessons of the Bombing', *Times*, 9 January 1941, p. 2.

The copy, as so often, was less damning. The council agreed that ‘an obvious precaution should be to send representatives to learn lessons from cities already bombed’ and a councillor reported that too many people had turned up at a shelter designed for 700. ‘Over 1,500 persons claimed admittance as having been bombed out and all were admitted and given breakfast, the truthful and the untruthful.’<sup>39</sup> Both elements had the potential for news reports but neither was followed up.

If the Manchester public felt that their suffering was largely ignored by *The Times*, however, the sense of neglect would have been greater in readers of the *Daily Mirror*, a newspaper that would have had a far larger circulation in a city based on manufacture and particularly so in the largely working class areas that felt the brunt of the bombing. The *Mirror*, made up of 12 tabloid pages and costing 1d throughout the study period, did not acknowledge that Manchester had been attacked until 24 December 1940, an edition later than *The Times*, and the front page story comprised only three short paragraphs at the bottom of the page that displayed unusual news values.<sup>40</sup> The introduction concentrated on the reported shooting down of an enemy aircraft – the word ‘reported’ suggests there has been no official confirmation, thus weakening the story – yet the second paragraph, which was the obvious news peg, read: ‘During a raid on a N-W town a number of people were trapped in cellars. Some houses were demolished and some people were killed.’ Even that paragraph had a surprising order of information because the deaths should have come before those trapped in the cellars and the demolished houses. On page two there was an indication of the scale of the bombing that had hit the city on the night of 22/23 December. Under the headline ‘Manchester gets its first big bombing’, the report read:

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> ‘Raider Down at Manchester’, *Daily Mirror*, 24 December 1940, p. 1.



Seventeen hours after the start of Sunday night's Blitz on Manchester, rescue squads were still working to free people trapped under damaged buildings in various parts of the city.<sup>41</sup>

The time scale, the word 'Blitz' and the fact that the bombing was not confined to a single area would have been an indicator of the size of the raid. The reporting was inadequate given that around 1,000 people died in Manchester, Salford and Stretford but from 24 December until the end of the study period the *Daily Mirror* made only one more reference to Manchester's Blitz and that was in a comment piece in the 'Tin Hat Tales' column of the 1 January edition. Even that was by way of an introduction to a reader's letter and began:

You probably heard the reference in a recent BBC news bulletin to a Manchester appeal urging people not to crowd into the bombed part of the town to 'view the damage'.<sup>42</sup>

That would suggest there was something to see but the *Mirror* did not report it and the main references to Manchester from Christmas were in the football results on page 10, addresses in advertisements, and in the imprint on page five, the main comment page.

The *Mirror* in the study period carried news on five of its 12 pages, and displayed the characteristics shown in other newspapers studied in this thesis in its determination to downplay German success and over-rate British triumphs. For example, on 17 December, the RAF was reported as hitting railways, munitions factories and power plants in Berlin while, in the story next to it, a 34-year-old woman was described as 'The angel of the shelter' for her work in Stratford.<sup>43</sup> It carried far more photographs – averaging six an edition – and put even greater emphasis on entertainment than its rivals, pages nine and 10, for example, carrying a short piece of fiction and a near full page of cartoons. This was apart from 'Jane', a

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<sup>41</sup> 'Manchester Gets its First Big Bombing', *Daily Mirror*, 24 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> 'Tin Hat Tales', *Daily Mirror*, 1 January 1941, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> 'Mother To 500 Children', *Daily Mirror*, 17 December 1940, p. 7.

daily cartoon pin-up that was considered such a circulation booster it appeared with the paper's main commentator, 'Cassandra', on page four. Jane 'was the heroine of the British Army', her contribution to the war effort being 'to take off an unprecedented number of clothes'.<sup>44</sup> The sexual theme was continued when a Baptist pastor in Weston-super-Mare claimed that the darkness and the close confinement of the shelters was leading to personal corruption. 'It has now become dangerous to a young man's moral reputation for him to be seen coming out of an air raid shelter at night,' the report stated.<sup>45</sup>

The newspaper failed entirely to note the rising crime rates that were affecting young men far more profoundly than nights in shelters, although it did carry a report from Manchester, 'Sentries guard milk'. The report read: "Milk watchers" have been organized in Manchester to break a racket that is robbing babies of their breakfast – the theft from doorsteps every morning in the blackout of bottles of milk.'<sup>46</sup> The report, the reference to babies' breakfasts designed to incur the reader's indignation, alleged that one supplier had counted 5,000 bottles missing in one week, yet, curiously no Manchester newspaper picked up the story. Whether that casts doubts on the veracity of the report is debatable, but the *Mirror* had several tales during the study period that provoke scepticism, most notably the crippled woman who had survived a night of extreme misfortune. It read: 'Tin hats off to a brave old lady who has been "bombed out" four times in a night.'<sup>47</sup> The report did not include the identity, the age or where this remarkable old lady lived but she was 'still smiling'.

The *Salford City Reporter's* initial coverage of the Manchester Blitz almost certainly suffered because of the Christmas holiday. Published on 27 December 1940,

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<sup>44</sup> Cudlipp, p. 69; Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Newspapermen: Hugh Cudlipp, Cecil Harmsworth King and the Glory Days of Fleet Street* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2003), p. 180.

<sup>45</sup> 'Vice Danger in Shelters', *Daily Mirror*, 17 December 1940, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> 'Sentries Guard Milk', *Daily Mirror*, 21 December 1940, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> 'Tin Hat Tales', *Daily Mirror*, 17 December 1940, p. 4.

the four-page edition suggested that many of its pages had been set before the first bomb had dropped and it was noticeable that a review of the year on page four amounted to more copy in terms of length than a report on page three, the main news page, on the air raids that had left more than 200 Salfordians dead and 900 injured. A further clue that the review had been compiled some time before publication was absence of any mention of the Blitz. The copy in the news report of the attacks was deferential to the censor in a manner even more pronounced than the Manchester newspapers and the introduction read: 'A town in the Manchester district had its most severe raid of the war on Sunday night. It lasted for many hours during which the sound of enemy bombers was heard at short intervals.'<sup>48</sup> Later the report went through the propaganda almost point by point: 'The public bore the indiscriminate attack with composure. In the morning they went to their occupations as normal. Morale was high.' There were just two reports on the raid and amounted to less than two columns in a paper that contained 28, amounting to around seven per cent of the edition.

This was not atypical. The *Reporter*, which cost three halfpence (just more than half a 1p), did not ape the national and Manchester newspapers by moving its news focus to London, but it did not do justice to the very important story on its doorstep either. Apart from 27 December, the *Reporter* comprised six pages throughout the study period, with adverts on the front page and reports from the courts dominating every edition. The first newspaper of 1941 proved to be the high water mark in terms of coverage of the Christmas Blitz, comprising nearly 70 per cent of the main news page (although this still represented a surprisingly meagre amount in the context of the whole paper). The lead story maintained the anonymity of Salford but the adjoining report illustrated the balancing act newspapers had in trying to

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<sup>48</sup> 'Blitz on N. W. Town', *Salford City Reporter*, 27 December 1940, p. 3.

appease the censor because it carried a tribute from an un-named Mayor.<sup>49</sup> Given the parochial nature of the rest of the newspaper, it would have been inconceivable that he could come from anywhere other than Salford.

The following week's newspaper, 10 January 1941, gave explicit mention of the Blitz only twice, an editorial on firewatchers and another report on housing the homeless, but that could have been because of censorial pressure. Certainly the coverage expanded when the editorial on 17 January announced: 'It is now possible to mention that Salford has recently suffered from air attack by the enemy.'<sup>50</sup> This tacit acknowledgement of government control would not have been news to the readers of the *Reporter*, who not only could see the city had been attacked but had been reading about it in the *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle* since 23 December. Nevertheless, the relaxation of the censorship restrictions allowed the *Reporter* to chronicle the visits of the Duke of Kent and Wendell Willkie and to print some human interest stories even if they never strayed from an heroic narrative. Thus there was the driver who courageously saved a bus depot; the Salford man who was awarded the George Medal for rescuing a woman and three children from a bombed building; and the gas foreman who fought a blaze in perilous circumstances.<sup>51</sup> The less commendable were absent from the *Reporter*'s pages and by the 7 February 1941 the Christmas Blitz was almost as scarce. There were just three mentions, and none was substantial.

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<sup>49</sup> 'Mayor's Message', *Salford City Reporter*, 3 January 1940, p. 3

<sup>50</sup> 'After The Raids', *Salford City Reporter*, 17 January 1941, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> 'Drove Burning Bus into Street', *Salford City Reporter*, 24 January 1941, p. 3; 'Gallantry in Salford Air Raids', *Salford City Reporter*, 31 January 1941, p. 3; 'Fought Fire on Top of Gas Holder', *Salford City Reporter*, 31 January 1941, p. 3.

#### 4. Conclusion

While the *Daily Mirror* may have had an old lady smiling through the Blitz, the evidence suggests she was exception. Just as the East End had been filled with plucky souls who could withstand the worst of the *Luftwaffe*, Mancunians were portrayed in the newspapers as a people unbowed by the Blitz of December 1940. This was a myth and, while many carried on bravely, a significant number were depressed and morale plummeted. Yet, the city's suffering disappeared off the news agenda within a matter of days, compounding a sense of neglect. The sales of the souvenir editions of the *Manchester Guardian* – that included only three references to the attack on the city – indicated the demand for news was clearly there, a demand that was never satisfied to unfortunate effects. Mancunians felt neglected and their suffering ignored, so that they became sceptical of news about the Blitz in general. Home Intelligence reported: 'Lack of news, plus a rather clumsy BBC handling of Manchester (both in the news and descriptive broadcasts) facilitated the Haw-Haw and rumour processes'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

## Part IV: Conclusion

### 1. Introduction

Curran and Seaton have argued that the Second World War was different from previous conflicts in that the British public was in the front line for the first time.

They wrote:

The strategic objective of the Blitz was to both physically impede war production and destroy psychologically the will of the civilian population to service the war effort. Extensive censorship controls were needed, it was claimed, in order to combat the new, deadly technology of aerial warfare.<sup>1</sup>

Newspapers, as the principal sources of news at the start of the war, became the focus of this censorship and the consequence was a shaping of content so that the press became an outlet for government propaganda. This thesis has shown that this applied to Manchester and other provincial newspapers as much as to the national press and led to the creation of myths that helped boost morale and unify the nation. Among them was the civilian reaction to the Blitz.

The conclusion will be organised around four main broader themes, related to the key original contributions of the thesis. It will start by briefly indicating how the research has provided fresh insight into the reporting of the Second World War and the dynamics of production by a neglected section of the media, the provincial press. Second, it will show it has added a further layer of complexity to our understanding of the experience of being bombed during the Second World War. Third, the wider issue of the reporting of the Manchester Blitz will be addressed. Fourth, an explanation will be offered as to how the study elaborated upon the relationship between newspapers and their audience. Finally, a closing example, taken from the *Manchester Guardian*, will reveal forcibly the chasm which had opened between the feelings of Mancunians

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<sup>1</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p.56.

and the reportage being presented by Manchester newspapers and thus tellingly lay bare how censorship, both government and self-imposed, influenced news reporting.

## 2. Provincial Newspapers

The first major contribution of the thesis is to the understanding of the provincial press between 1939 and 1945. Circulation figures underline the importance of local and regional newspapers in the Second World War in that, while the sales of national newspapers rose by 5.5 million to 15.4 million between 1937 and 1947, the corresponding figure for the provincial, weekly and bi-weekly publications was 10.2 million (13.5 million to 23.7 million).<sup>2</sup> This meant the British public were reading more provincial newspapers in comparison to the national press at a rate of between 36 and 54 per cent. The fact that the censor gave local newspapers more freedom when it came to reporting bomb damage underlines the fundamental contribution they played in providing a conduit of news and a communication channel between the authorities and the public. Other studies have neglected local newspapers and this study is further focused by concentrating on Manchester, a city so important in terms of newspaper production in Britain that it was known as ‘the other Fleet Street’.<sup>3</sup>

The role of the provincial press in the Second World War was trumpeted in 1946 by Sir William Bailey, the president of the Newspaper Society, when he harked back to what he had written in October 1939:

It is now a matter for each and every one of us to see that... our papers come out for the continued information of our readers and the sustaining of their morale in what may prove to be a long struggle.<sup>4</sup>

Seven years on from those words Bailey, whose organisation represented and promoted the interests of Britain’s regional and local newspapers, had grounds,

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> Waterhouse, *Other Fleet Street*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Fletcher, *Never Failed*, p. 5.

notwithstanding his subjectivity, for leading the chorus of praise in a preface to the book with the self-congratulatory title: *They Never Failed: The Story of the Provincial Press in Wartime*. The narrative within local newspapers had provided a vital service during the Second World War, carrying important central and local government messages into millions of homes, providing entertainment and respite in the face of nights of bombing, and keeping thousands of soldiers, sailors and airmen in touch with what was happening at home. This was done despite newspaper offices being bombed, occasionally to destruction, the rationing of newsprint and ink, shortages of staff, and disruptions to transport infrastructure. Bailey added: 'Provincial newspapers overcame their difficulties, and, true to long established tradition, they always came out.'<sup>5</sup>

This thesis, however, has challenged another of his assertions that appeared in that same preface. Namely:

Now, after nearly six years of war – in which those newspapers have carried home-town news to men and women in every part of the world, and by their faithful reporting of local, national and international events have inspired new confidence in their readers – those newspapers enjoy a prestige higher than at any other time in their long history.<sup>6</sup>

This was nonsense. By examining the three most influential provincial newspapers in Manchester in 1940 and 1941, this thesis has shown that the reporting was not faithful to the events, but chose instead to adopt a narrative that relentlessly stressed the positive and, as a consequence, confidence in the press did the opposite to Bailey's assertion and diminished. This was borne out by Home Intelligence inspectors, by Mass Observation diarists and by surveys that were commissioned by the Ministry of Information.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



Yet the circulations grew, underlining that readers' motivations for buying a newspaper are more complex than a desire to be informed about the war. Non-war and lighter news, business and entertainment were also incentives to buy newspapers and this was reflected in the amount of space Manchester's press devoted to these items. The quantitative analysis in this thesis demonstrated that war news filled 20, 15 and 17 per cent of the *Manchester Guardian*, *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle* respectively during the study period, meaning that at least 80 per cent of the editions were filled with other items.<sup>7</sup>

Little attention has been paid in the past to the dynamics of newspaper production between 1939 and 1945, something this thesis has gone some way to address. Conscription ensured that Manchester's newspapers had to operate with reduced numbers of staff and those who remained were at either end of the age scale. This had implications for reporting and sub-editing, but not on the same scale as the censorship of the main sources of national and international news, the press agencies. This meant that the war news, largely derived from communiqués, was homogenized, strictly controlled and heavily laced with propaganda. Rationing of newsprint also had a profound effect, reducing all the newspapers to a third or less of their pre-war sizes and meaning that many news stories that normally would have been printed had to be suppressed. There was also the question of how newspapers balanced their commercial interests with their restricted resources and the research confirmed the findings of the 1949 Press Commission that reported that advertising migrated away from the national newspapers to the provinces.<sup>8</sup> Advertising filled 24 per cent of the *Manchester Guardian*, a national, while the corresponding figures for the *Manchester Evening News* and *Evening Chronicle* were 56 and 43 per cent.

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<sup>7</sup> Appendix 2

<sup>8</sup> Royal Commission, p. 5.

### 3. The Reaction to Being Bombed

Another major contribution the thesis makes is to demonstrate there was a more nuanced reaction to the bombing than was portrayed by the newspapers. While some people displayed stoicism, efficiency and bravery under often appalling conditions during the Blitz, there were less-heroic, one could say natural, alternatives to this narrative of an unbowed population standing up unflinchingly to extreme adversity. The emphasis of many histories, too, has been on London and this thesis has helped underline that most cities in Britain endured their own bombings, with all the national and regional characteristics that implied. Mass Observation's files show this, just as entries in diaries and reports reveal changes in behaviour, including absenteeism, laxer morals and increased alcohol consumption. Dr George Franklin, a wartime psychoanalyst, reported that this 'jaunty behaviour' was a reaction to heightened anxiety and that people used bravado to hide their fears. He added:

Apparently normal people drank more alcohol. Sexual desire, especially in women, was much intensified during the Blitz. A number of men complained to me about their wives making excessive demands and I know of very many who were unfaithful to their husbands.<sup>9</sup>

Communities reacted differently to being attacked by the *Luftwaffe* depending on the regularity of the bombing, the demographics, the extent of the damage to housing and the city's infrastructure, local jealousies and the ability of the authorities to react. Cities could respond differently at different times, too, as Home Intelligence discovered when inspectors recorded contrasting moods in Liverpool in December 1940 and May 1941.<sup>10</sup>

Histories of the Blitz frequently have Manchester as a footnote, despite its status as a major urban and commercial centre, important inland port and print centre.

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<sup>9</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> Mass Observation, FRs 538 and 706.

This thesis has addressed this, pointing out that nearly one in 60 casualties of the *Luftwaffe*'s bombing campaign was suffered in the 30-hour period of the Christmas Blitz. It also noted that the reaction to the 1940 Blitz was that of shock borne by timing and an attitude bordering on complacency. The thesis has shown that Manchester's mood was that of diminishing concern as the city approached the holiday period relatively untouched by war. There had been isolated raids but the multi-plane Blitzes had been reserved for Liverpool 35 miles to the west and most of the children who had been evacuated in autumn 1939 had returned to the city. As Maurice Roe, a child in Manchester in 1940, wrote, there was a sense of security: 'In the Manchester area there had been a few sporadic raids, but nothing serious. So much so, that we didn't always go to the shelter when the sirens sounded. But all this changed at Christmas 1940.'<sup>11</sup>

The shock when the *Luftwaffe* came on 22 December was profound. Home Intelligence inspectors wrote that morale plummeted and there were other reports that differed from the heroic accounts that were being printed in newspapers.<sup>12</sup> Brenda Lees wrote of her limbs trembling with fright; 'David', of Old Trafford, of his brother, a toddler, who was so traumatised he did not speak for a year; Frank Mackegg of the deep shock of walking into Ancoats Hospital to find a waiting room 'full of corpses'; and Joan Timms of returning from a shelter to discover burglars had broken into her Stretford home and stolen her Christmas presents.<sup>13</sup> The need to

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<sup>11</sup> Maurice Roe, *Childhood Memories of Wartime Manchester* (BBC People's War, 2004) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/92/a3141992.shtml>> [accessed 4 September 2009] (para. 12).

<sup>12</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>13</sup> Lees, *Letter to my Husband*; David, *A Landmine Falls on Norton Street, Old Trafford*, by David (BBC People's War, 2004) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/21/a2788121.shtml>> [accessed 4 September 2009] (para. 4); Frank Mackegg, *The Weekend before Christmas 1940: Clayton, Manchester - Effects of Bombing and Growing Up Fast* (BBC People's War, 2003) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/25/a2034325.shtml>> accessed 4 September 2009] (para 3); Joan Timms, *The Manchester Blitz: Christmas 1940* (BBC People's War, 2004)

bolster morale in the face of persistent attack prompted the government eagerly to push the message of defiance and the popular image, usually centred on London, of a people who refused to be cowed. Many were not, but this thesis has shown that others questioned the worth and validity of the war effort when their lives were being jeopardised on a nightly basis. Rather than ‘we can take it’, they wondered ‘is it worth the misery’?

#### 4. Reporting the Blitz

Manchester’s newspapers, for reasons including censorial, patriotic, hegemonic and financial, neglected to record these reactions and thus abandoned self-adopted news values. Stephen Bax wrote that three things are expected of a responsible press:

We expect newspaper reports to be accurate, as far as possible. If the facts are uncertain, however, the least we expect is that the press show caution and indicate any sources of doubt. Thirdly, if there is any hint of propaganda, we expect the press to be critical and questioning to ensure their independence and to ensure balance.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis has shown that Manchester’s newspapers were often inaccurate, rarely indicated sources of doubt, did not confront the propaganda they were being fed from official sources and failed to report municipal deficiencies. These included a lack of preparation for the Blitz of December 1940, the shortage of food and shelters, and the inability at local government level to react to changing circumstances. All these shortcomings were reported by Home Intelligence in January 1941 and were most vividly summed up by the city’s buses sticking rigidly to prescribed routes in December 1940 even though bomb damage made them impassable.<sup>15</sup> There was also

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<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/24/a2031724.shtml>> [accessed 4 September 2009] (para. 7).

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Bax. ‘Beware the Press in Times of War’, *British Journalism Review*, 17, 2 (2006), p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

no mention in Manchester's newspapers of a shocked population, nor of potential unrest, yet Haley, the editor of the *Manchester Evening News*, wrote in his diary that he had to pass through a line of soldiers 'with drawn bayonets' on his way to work, not just for one day, but four.<sup>16</sup>

Newspapers, in Manchester and nationally, ignored these deviations from the normal heroic narrative and, instead, they followed the trail laid for them by officials. The government drew back from taking advantage of its full censorship powers, partly because the ideal of a free press was one of the symbols of democracy Britain was defending against the Nazis, but also because newspapers were so compliant. The chairman of the Newspaper Emergency Council wrote to the MOI in 1939 that 'our respective tasks and duties are complementary', while some editors complained that the MOI was 'too permissive in its advisory guidelines'.<sup>17</sup>

These duties extended to deliberately ignoring stories that fit the label of 'big news' under any circumstances. The *Daily Telegraph*, for example, learned of the cracking of the German Enigma Code and chose not to publish the information. Price wrote:

On occasion the papers even helped save the government from itself. Whitehall was no less leaky than in peacetime but when journalists obtained highly sensitive material they usually buried it rather than publish dramatic scoops that would have aided the enemy.<sup>18</sup>

Given that the deciphering of Enigma Code was the 'most secret of state secrets' and that Allied lives would have been put at risk by publication, the *Telegraph's* decision was fully justified, but it is less easy to reconcile the example revealed in this thesis in which the *Manchester Guardian* chose not to report in June 1941 that Hitler was

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<sup>16</sup> Churchill Archives, Haley, 29 December 1940.

<sup>17</sup> *Guardian* Archive, Ministry of Information, 1/187, Letter to the Censorship Bureau, 10 September 1939; Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Price, *Where Power Lies*, p. 127.

preparing to invade the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> This would not have helped the enemy, if anything the publication of this material would have helped the war effort as it could have forewarned the Soviets. Churchill – ‘I gave clear and precise warning to Stalin of what was coming’ – had been briefing the Kremlin since April.<sup>20</sup> The reluctance to print other stories, the talks between French generals and Churchill to unite the UK and France into one country being a prime example, illustrate the *Manchester Guardian*’s reticence to face the MOI’s fire, partly because the editor, Crozier, feared the consequences, but principally because he felt it was part of his duty to promote the war effort.

Manchester’s newspapers were not exceptional. This thesis also analysed national newspapers, in particular *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror*, and they, too, subscribed to the myth of unflinching fortitude, adopting a template first ascribed to London and then extended to cover the whole of Britain. The tone was always optimistic and there were grounds for questioning the veracity of much of what was reported. Allied successes were exaggerated, German raids diminished, and the *Luftwaffe* was indicted for bombing schools, hospitals and houses while the RAF was lauded for unerringly destroying the means of war production. Charles Lynch, a Canadian reporter assigned to the British Army by the news agency Reuters, provided a verdict:

It’s humiliating to look back at what we wrote during the war. It was crap... We were a propaganda arm of our governments. At the start the censors enforced that, but by the end we were our own censors. We were the cheerleaders. I suppose there wasn’t an alternative at the time. It was total war. But, for God’s sake, let’s not glorify our role. It wasn’t very good journalism. It wasn’t journalism at all.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Broad, *Churchill*, p.329

<sup>21</sup> Knightley, *First Casualty*, p. 364.

## 5. Propaganda and the Audience

Just as there were differing reactions to being bombed, there was a varied response by the audience to what was being written in their newspapers. This thesis has shown how the circuit of communication between the press and its readers changed between 1939 and 1945 so that the reporting of the war became distorted. Home Intelligence reported that the British public accepted that the government could 'choose' what war news could be published, but the cost of this acquiescence was that trust in the press diminished accordingly.<sup>22</sup> Newspapers did not print the truth and the public, many of whom in the bombed areas could see with their own eyes, knew it. Yet both parties largely accepted this on the basis it was in the national interest. As this thesis noted earlier, Bingham argued that neither the journalist nor the newspaper buyer is guaranteed to believe what is written or read.<sup>23</sup>

This sheds a new light on the propaganda model. Cottle argued that the theory of manufactured consent is more complex than the top-down progression propagated by Herman and Chomsky in that people 'obeyed' for a variety of reasons, including tradition, apathy and pragmatic acquiescence.<sup>24</sup> He added:

We cannot simply assume that media propaganda...necessarily succeeds ideologically, or, even if it does, that this constitutes the principal explanation for popular compliance. Studies of media audiences quickly reveal there is more cultural translation, context dependency and active sense-making going on in processes of media reception than generalised claims about 'manufacturing consent' appear to envisage, or investigate.<sup>25</sup>

This thesis has shown that, for much of the time, the propaganda in the newspapers succeeded because the need, identified by Home Intelligence, for readers to cast themselves in a heroic mould corresponded with the image they were being presented

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<sup>22</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

<sup>23</sup> Bingham, *Gender*, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*, p.19

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

by the press.<sup>26</sup> In Manchester's case, this same propaganda became an impediment, however, when the reporting continued in the same vein after the heavy bombing of December 1940 and Mancunians felt their suffering was being neglected and belittled. As Home Intelligence reported, this provoked 'violent feeling', with middle-classes readers particularly aggrieved.<sup>27</sup> Rita Maloney, the Mass Observation diarist, concurred, writing that the media's reaction to the Manchester Blitz caused her to question the reliability of reports about Coventry and Liverpool.<sup>28</sup>

She was not alone in reacting negatively to the propaganda. Ayres wrote it had the effect of making some women feel 'guilty, apologetic and anxious to justify themselves' if they did not assume some sort of labour on top of their 'normal' household duties, and this thesis has reported several instances of people wondering what was being hidden from them.<sup>29</sup> These included: the 12-year-old future editor of the *Sunday Times* and *The Times* having his faith in the veracity of newspapers damaged when he met troops evacuated from Dunkirk; a Preston salesman who was so wary of what was being printed he did not believe the casualty figures after the Coventry Blitz; and the North-West lorry driver who could give a specific number of the dead in a single night in Liverpool, 50,917, as gossip flourished in the space perceived between the truth and the propaganda being pushed into the public sphere by the newspapers. These were not the comments of people who had discovered Bailey's 'new confidence' in the press and, as Hylton, argued, 'the newspaper industry would never fully regain the trust it had enjoyed before Chamberlain'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mass Observation, Box 1, *Propaganda*, 18 September 1940.

<sup>27</sup> Mass Observation, FR 538.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Ayers, *Women at War*, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Hylton, *Darkest Hour*, p.136



Nevertheless circulations rose and a survey conducted by Mass Observation in May 1940 gave indications why.<sup>31</sup> The report stated that people looked to war news first, but had more permanent interests that overcame the scepticism provoked by the stream of propaganda. It also included a table of responses from 118 interviewees in Fulham and Silvertown, London, to the question: what items do you like best in your daily newspaper? The answers were:

Items	Totals
News	30
Truth	20
Articles	19
Politics (The political attitude of the paper)	19
Sport	7
Format	7
Comics	7
Pictures	6
Stories	2
Astrology	1

This was a London survey, with a relatively low number of responses, but it nevertheless was an indicator of the motives behind newspaper buying. It is interesting that, at a time when newspapers felt it was important frequently to conceal the truth, 20 of the respondents chose that as their principal motive for reading the press.

## 6. 'Subject to the Inevitable Abridgements'

An indicator of the Manchester press's misjudgement of the mood of its readers, and its desire not to criticise the authorities was epitomised by a cameo that happened on the first anniversary of the city's Blitz, Christmas Eve 1941. Manchester's centre was full of shoppers, particularly in the Market Street and

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<sup>31</sup> Mass Observation, FR 126.

Deansgate areas, Dennis Wood, a retired Manchester policeman from the Heaton Park area of the city, among them. He recalled:

Fresh in everyone's mind was the awful bombing of the previous year when the Blitz had taken such a toll. Following that horrendous period the bombing had eased and the people were beginning to relax.<sup>32</sup>

The festive mood disappeared at 3 pm, however, when three bombers appeared low over the roofs, the bomb doors opened, and objects were seen to be falling from the aircraft. Wood continued: 'Everyone dashed to find shelter fearing that bombs were falling. In the rush several people including some children were injured, some being run over by vehicles.'<sup>33</sup> Only when it became apparent that there were no explosions and the objects were leaflets bearing a road safety message from the Chief Constable did the panic subside. The reaction to this insensitive act was one of suppressed anger, particularly as neither the Chairman of the Watch Committee nor the Lord Mayor, who was laying a wreath on the communal grave for the victims of 1940 as the incident happened, had been informed. The Mayor said: 'It might have been wise to have given some warning to the public before carrying out the leaflet drop.'<sup>34</sup> As Freethy noted:

This was an understatement if ever there was one, but there must have been a great deal of pre-planning because photographs of the leaflet-dropping were taken, as were shots of civilians reading the leaflets. What had not been properly thought out was the insensitive disregard for the feelings of those who grieved for the dead or perhaps were injured themselves during the 1940 raid. No wonder there was a mini panic.<sup>35</sup>

The incident, with people so scared that they were injured fleeing, stripped bare the myth that had been pedalled by newspapers of the phlegmatic British and 'we can take it', and perhaps that influenced the reaction of the press. Under normal circumstances, and given the Mayor's indignation, reporters would have berated

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<sup>32</sup> Freethy, *Lancashire v Hitler*, p. 16

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

official incompetence, particularly as the drop had happened because a police inspector had close friends in the RAF, but the *Manchester Guardian* instead turned its fire on the public. The reaction was so extraordinary the first four paragraphs of the report are worth reproducing in full:

As part of a new campaign to reduce the number of road accidents in the Manchester area, three RAF bombers were employed to fly over the rooftops of the city on Wednesday afternoon and drop leaflets containing an appeal by the Chief Constable for more care on the part of drivers and pedestrians. The planes made several runs over the principal shopping streets, which were thronged with people doing last minute Christmas buying, and allowed what wind and air currents there were to carry the message below.

To the great majority of people the great roar of the aircraft and the sudden descent of the leaflets came as a surprise. The only notice given to the public was by means of a paragraph in a late edition of an evening newspaper.

Until the markings of the planes were distinguished there was some speculation as to whose machines they really were. When the leaflets came down many people, drawing the conclusion that they must have been sent in order to read them, went into the roadway to collect them. In doing so they paid little heed to the long lanes of Christmas traffic, and there were many narrow escapes from accident. Some other people, astonished by the unusual display, or interested in seeing a bomber at such close quarters, chose the roadway as a vantage-point from which to watch.

This foolishness on the part of the bewildered public was said by a police official amply to illustrate that the public is still unaware of the need to take infinite care, whatever their circumstances. He added that as all the other forms of propaganda seemed to have failed to educate the public sufficiently, it was decided to organise the air raid as a 'novel' way of attracting attention.<sup>36</sup>

The *Guardian*'s report is an extreme example, but the haranguing of people who had been scared by an act of insensitive official incompetence epitomises how far removed the reports appearing in Manchester newspapers were from what was happening on the streets of the city. It is not difficult to understand why readers lost trust in what they read, and why, if the self-appointed watchdogs of their society could misjudge and fabricate so readily, they could also subscribe to an uncritical version of steadfastness under the fire of the *Luftwaffe*.

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<sup>36</sup> 'R. A. F. Bombers Over Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 December 1941, p. 4.

The myth of the Blitz was a construction formed by an alliance between the government and the press that has become so ingrained in society that it has become the accepted version of life in the Second World War. The above report was indicative of gap that had been opened between newspapers and readers and helps answer the questions posed at the start of this thesis. Manchester's newspapers did exceed the demands of the censor and did so because of a number of reasons, the most potent of which was a desire to support the war effort. The effect was further to damage the reputation of newspapers. Barthes wrote that the journalist, the producer of myths, 'starts with a concept and seeks a form for it' and between 1939 and 1945 that form was the unbreakable fortitude of the British under fire.<sup>37</sup> Barthes also stated that 'the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal' and the narrative of the newspapers has been so persuasive that it has become *the* history of the home front in the Second World War.<sup>38</sup> Such was the scale of the contribution made by journalism to the articulation and social negotiation of the myth of the Blitz. As this thesis has shown, the Manchester newspapers performed a particularly significant, if contingent, role in the writing of that history.

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<sup>37</sup> Barthes, p. 128.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

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## Appendix 1: Newspaper Circulations

### The circulation of national daily newspapers in the UK (in thousands, to the nearest thousand)

	1910	1930	1939	1951
Daily Express	400	1603	2486	4193
Daily Herald	-	750	2000	2071
Daily Mail	900	1968	1510	2245
Daily Mirror	630	1071	1367	4567
Daily News	320	900	-	-
Daily Sketch	750	1013	850	777
Daily Telegraph	230	222	640	976
D. Worker/Morning Star	-	-	100	115
Manchester Guardian	40	47	51	140
News Chronicle	800	967	1317	1583
Times	45	187	213	254
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4115</b>	<b>8728</b>	<b>10534</b>	<b>16921</b>

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### Newspaper circulations in Great Britain, pre and post-war

Class of newspaper	Total circulation 1937 Average net circulation per issue	Total circulation 1947 Average net circulation for four weeks ending June 29, 1947
National morning	9,903, 427	15,449,410
London evening	1,806, 910	3,501,599
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,710,337</b>	<b>18,951,009</b>
Provincial morning	1,600,000*	2,700,000*
Provincial evening	4,434,042	6,780,540
Other weeklies and bi-weeklies	7,420,000	14,241,692
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13,454,042</b>	<b>23,722,232</b>

\* to the nearest 100,000, given to the Royal Commission of the Press in round figures to avoid disclosure of exact circulations.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Butler and Sloman, *Political Facts*, p. 388.

<sup>40</sup> Royal Commission, p. 195.

## Appendix 2

## Quantitative Analysis of Newspapers: 17/12/1940 to 04/02/1941

**Figures in centimetres. Variations in percentages due to rounding up and down.**

[illegible]

MANCHESTER GUARDIAN 24/12/1940												
											%	
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	Page 7	Page 8			TOTAL	
WAR	0	0	0	50	351	165	0	28			594	20
NON-WAR	0	12	1	45	27	86	0	70			241	8
COMMENT	0	0	85	232	0	0	0	60			377	13
ENTERTAINMENT	0	145	54	13	0	19	0	173			404	13
BUSINESS	0	188	0	0	0	0	346	0			534	18
CARTOONS/PICS	0	0	189	0	0	0	0	0			189	6
ADVERTS	355	33	49	38	0	108	32	47			662	22
TOTAL	355	378	378	378	378	378	378	378			3001	100

[illegible]

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

[illegible][illegible]

## Totals

[illegible]

## Manchester Evening News

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS 17/12/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	231	0	50	0	0	152	433	19
NON-WAR	43	0	144	0	0	92	279	12
COMMENT	0	57	0	0	0	0	57	3
ENTERTAINMENT	0	127	0	0	0	11	138	6
BUSINESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CARTOONS/PICS	0	32	0	0	0	0	32	1
ADVERTS	80	162	184	378	378	123	1305	58
TOTAL	354	378	378	378	378	378	2244	99

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS 24/12/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	264	0	30	0	0	102	396	18
NON-WAR	24	0	161	74	66	168	493	22
COMMENT	0	67	0	0	0	0	67	3
ENTERTAINMENT	0	145	0	74	19	10	248	11
BUSINESS	0	0	0	116	0	0	116	5
CARTOONS/PICS	0	11	8	0	10	8	37	2
ADVERTS	66	155	179	114	283	90	887	40
TOTAL	354	378	378	378	378	378	2244	101

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS 31/12/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	232	0	53	0	0	178	463	21
NON-WAR	28	0	113	0	0	77	218	10
COMMENT	0	121	0	0	0	0	121	5
ENTERTAINMENT	0	54	0	0	0	9	63	3
BUSINESS	0	0	0	0	0	15	15	1
CARTOONS/PICS	27	38	0	0	0	0	65	3
ADVERTS	67	165	212	378	378	99	1299	58
TOTAL	354	378	378	378	378	378	2244	101

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS 07/01/41								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	145	0	7	0	0	125	277	12
NON-WAR	113	0	117	0	0	125	355	16
COMMENT	0	168	0	0	0	0	168	7
ENTERTAINMENT	0	51	0	0	0	0	51	2
BUSINESS	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	0
CARTOONS/PICS	17	0	17	0	0	0	34	2
ADVERTS	79	159	237	378	378	123	1354	60
TOTAL	354	378	378	378	378	378	2244	99

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS 14/01/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	160	0	5	0	0	32	197	9
NON-WAR	82	0	156	0	0	200	438	20
COMMENT	0	156	0	0	0	0	156	7
ENTERTAINMENT	0	54	23	0	0	2	79	4
BUSINESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CARTOONS/PICS	22	0	0	0	0	22	44	2
ADVERTS	90	168	194	378	378	122	1330	59
TOTAL	354	378	378	378	378	378	2244	101

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS 21/01/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	263	0	43	0	0	56	362	16
NON-WAR	2	0	148	0	0	176	326	15
COMMENT	0	169	0	0	0	0	169	8
ENTERTAINMENT	0	49	0	0	0	2	51	2
BUSINESS	0	0	0	0	0	46	46	2
CARTOONS/PICS	10	0	7	0	0	0	17	1
ADVERTS	79	160	180	378	378	98	1273	57
TOTAL	354	378	378	378	378	378	2244	101



MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS 04/02/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	250	0	0	0	0	41	291	13
NON-WAR	6	0	210	0	0	195	411	18
COMMENT	0	148	0	0	0	0	148	7
ENTERTAINMENT	0	50	0	0	0	5	55	2
BUSINESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CARTOONS/PICS	17	13	10	0	0	22	62	3
ADVERTS	81	167	158	378	378	115	1277	57
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>2244</b>	<b>100</b>

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## Evening Chronicle

EVENING CHRONICLE 17/12/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	201	0	99	9	0	35	344	13
NON-WAR	107	0	34	33	0	90	264	10
COMMENT	0	162	0	0	0	0	162	6
ENTERTAINMENT	0	61	108	191	74	2	436	17
BUSINESS	0	0	0	0	0	74	74	3
CARTOONS/PICS	7	15	9	0	27	0	58	2
ADVERTS	103	202	190	207	339	239	1280	49
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>2618</b>	<b>100</b>

EVENING CHRONICLE 24/12/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	352	227	95	36	0	235	945	36
NON-WAR	39	0	143	15	3	79	279	11
COMMENT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ENTERTAINMENT	0	62	48	197	303	15	625	24
BUSINESS	0	0	0	97	0	0	97	4
CARTOONS/PICS	0	0	17	26	0	33	76	3
ADVERTS	27	151	137	69	134	78	596	23
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>2618</b>	<b>101</b>

EVENING CHRONICLE 31/12/1940								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	274	0	79	0	0	99	452	17
NON-WAR	39	0	84	20	0	59	202	8
COMMENT	0	151	0	0	0	0	151	6
ENTERTAINMENT	0	77	61	112	95	141	486	19
BUSINESS	0	0	0	18	0	73	91	4
CARTOONS/PICS	23	0	29	0	27	0	79	3
ADVERTS	82	212	187	290	318	68	1157	44
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>2618</b>	<b>101</b>

EVENING CHRONICLE 07/01/1941								
								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	260	0	84	21	0	91	456	17
NON-WAR	34	0	38	0	0	52	124	5
COMMENT	0	163	0	0	0	0	163	6
ENTERTAINMENT	0	83	54	228	83	20	468	18
BUSINESS	0	0	0	50	0	40	90	3
CARTOONS/PICS	29	0	0	28	9	0	66	2
ADVERTS	95	194	264	113	348	237	1251	48
TOTALS	418	440	440	440	440	440	2618	99

EVENING CHRONICLE 14/01/1941								
								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	215	0	5	0	0	17	237	9
NON-WAR	112	0	152	0	0	148	412	16
COMMENT	0	149	0	0	0	0	149	6
ENTERTAINMENT	0	65	27	225	80	26	423	16
BUSINESS	0	0	0	39	0	36	75	3
CARTOONS/PICS	8	0	0	0	27	0	35	1
ADVERTS	83	226	256	176	333	213	1287	49
TOTALS	418	440	440	440	440	440	2618	100

EVENING CHRONICLE 21/01/1941								
								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	195	0	91	0	40	93	419	16
NON-WAR	85	0	119	14	0	121	339	13
COMMENT	0	154	0	0	0	0	154	6
ENTERTAINMENT	0	77	45	230	29	5	386	15
BUSINESS	0	0	0	84	0	10	94	4
CARTOONS/PICS	23	0	0	0	27	0	50	2
ADVERTS	115	209	185	112	344	211	1176	45
TOTALS	418	440	440	440	440	440	2618	101

EVENING CHRONICLE 28/01/1941								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	237	0	28	0	0	107	372	14
NON-WAR	99	0	214	0	0	40	353	13
COMMENT	0	155	0	0	0	0	155	6
ENTERTAINMENT	0	61	87	176	74	106	504	19
BUSINESS	0	0	0	54	0	22	76	3
CARTOONS/PICS	7	0	29	0	27	0	63	2
ADVERTS	75	224	82	210	339	165	1095	42
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>2618</b>	<b>99</b>

EVENING CHRONICLE 04/02/1941								%
	Page 1	Page 2	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	TOTAL	
WAR	212	0	30	65	0	3	310	11
NON-WAR	107	0	171	10	0	138	426	16
COMMENT	0	145	0	0	0	0	145	6
ENTERTAINMENT	0	54	12	163	73	47	349	13
BUSINESS	0	0	0	0	0	76	76	3
CARTOONS/PICS	25	20	0	21	28	0	94	4
ADVERTS	74	221	227	181	339	176	1218	47
TOTALS	418	440	440	440	440	440	2618	100

## Totals

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**Appendix 3 National Newspapers printing in Manchester in 1940**

Daily Express  
Daily Herald  
Daily Mail  
Daily Sketch  
Daily Telegraph  
News Chronicle  
Manchester Guardian  
People  
Sunday Chronicle  
Sunday Dispatch  
Sunday Express  
Sunday Graphic  
Sunday Times